

WANDERER AND · KING ·



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WANDERER AND KING

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*FACE TO FACE WITH
NAPOLEON.*

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*IN THE YEAR OF
WATERLOO.*

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"Into the stream went horse and man"

Frontispiece

WANDERER AND KING

BY

O. V. CAINE

AUTHOR OF "FACE TO FACE WITH NAPOLEON," ETC.

Toronto

LANGTON AND HALL, LIMITED

Note

FOR many of the historical incidents in this story the writer desires to acknowledge his indebtedness to the well-known collection of *Boscobel Tracts*, edited by Mr. J. Hughes, supplemented as they have been in recent years by other volumes, and more especially by Mr. Allan Fea's interesting book on *The Flight of the King*. Though in some details the contemporary narratives differ, and though Charles' own account dictated to Pepys is not free from mistakes, the writer believes that he has reproduced with exactness what is known of the latter part of the King's memorable journey, and in only one point has he tampered with chronology, namely, in lengthening by a day or two Charles' stay at Hambledon, and in shortening by a day or two his stay at Heale. With the historical personages who form the great majority of the actors in the tale—Colonel Wyndham and his family, Miss Coningsby, William Ellesdon, Lord Wilmot, Dr. Henchman, Colonel Philips, Colonel Gunter, and many others of less note—he has not, he hopes, taken any unwarrantable freedom, unless it be in suggesting an attachment between Ellesdon and Miss Coningsby for which he knows of no foundation in fact.

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Introductory

ON the shores of one of the noblest rivers of the Old Dominion there lies a terraced garden set with forest trees, and high above the garden, looking across its lawns and fountains to a distant prospect of the sea, there stands, as massive as its builders left it nearly two centuries and a half ago, an old and stately house. Above the doorway with its climbing roses, above the stone shield over it, carved with the bearings of an ancient race, an oriel window breaks the deep red brickwork of the great façade, and sometimes the rich sunlight shining through it illuminates a dim and spacious room, full of old pictures and old-fashioned scents. One of the pictures represents a man of middle life, clothed in the gallant court dress of a Cavalier, a man with a well-set figure, a fine presence and a laughing eye, but with a complexion almost as dark as the dye of the walnut trees growing outside. Under the picture on a chest of blackened oak there lies a glass case with a railing round it, and a strange miscellany within—a boy's silver tankard, a golden snuff-box better suited to a man, and a suit of gray cloth of the commonest texture and the plainest make. To each of these relics is attached a slip of paper traced in a straggling hand and in a faded ink, and signed with the initials J. E. The note upon the silver cup says briefly—"From old friends at Sherborne School." That on the snuff-box speaks with more pomp and precision—"Presented to me

by Sir William Berkeley and the loyal gentlemen of Virginia on the happy restoration of His Gracious Majesty, King Charles II"—the word "Gracious" being written in at the top, in place of the word "Sacred" visibly struck out below. And across the suit of clothes, in larger writing, marking a thing not lightly to be missed, there runs the strange inscription :

"THE CLOTHES IN WHICH I PLAYED THE KING."

Since the words were written, many a generation has passed across those dim and spacious rooms ; has made the old house ring with life and laughter as strong and joyous as any Cavalier's ; has waited on its lawns in nights of summer to breathe the scent of roses and the saltiness of the sea. Other newer loyalties have replaced the dead traditions—a larger citizenship, a superber freedom, a dominion of which no old Virginian dared to dream. But still the simple relics, with their story of brave adventure, generous service, gallant faith, are left where their owner laid them so lovingly long ago, in a land where the faults of fallen kings are forgotten, but the memories of old attachments live.

Wanderer and King

CHAPTER I

A SCHOOL ANNIVERSARY IN 1651

“ Come your ways,
Bonny Boys
Of the Town,
For now is the time or never !
Shall your fears
Or your cares
Cast you down ?
Hang your wealth,
And your health ;
Get renown ;
Or we all are undone forever ! ”

A HANDSOME lad of eighteen was singing the well-known song of the discontented Cavaliers in a deep strong voice and in a spirit of mischief which delighted the company round him. And when the cry, “ Give us some more of it, Wyndham,” rang out from the bottom of the room, it was immediately taken up and echoed by a score of other voices young and clear.

The singer paused and glanced round the old hall. His eyes wandered over the crowded supper-tables and the uproarious audience of boys, over the groined arches, the gilt and painted tracery, the vaulted roof, over the dais, where on a carved chair under the picture of King Edward VI, the head-master sat with a smile on his lean face, and they

rested at last—it might have seemed provokingly—on the flushed features of a big fellow at his side.

“ Shall I sing the rest, Trenchard ? ” he asked with a laugh.

“ Sing any rubbish you like,” growled the other in no conciliatory tone, and immediately his questioner broke into a sonorous stave :

“ Shall we still
Suffer ill
And be dumb ?
And let every varlet undo us ?
Shall we doubt
Of each lout
That doth come,
With a voice
Like the noise
Of a drum,
And a sword or a buff-coat to us ? ”

“ Chorus, you fellows,” he added, and four-fifths of those present took up the refrain :

“ Now the King and the Crown
Are tumbling down,
And the Realm doth groan with disasters,
And the scum of the land
Are the men that command,
And our slaves are become our masters ! ”

But instead of ringing out triumphantly, as such confident sentiments should, the chorus flagged and wavered, and died depressingly away. A certain air of melancholy fell on the assembly, almost as if they felt the words too true, and when the singer settled into his seat again, his neighbour rose, a tankard in his hand.

“ Trenchard will give us a song now,” called the voice from the bottom of the hall.

But the big fellow with the flushed face stood silent, an unmistakable sneer on his lips, as he faced the audience which he was determined to defy.

"No, I won't sing, but I'll give you a toast," he said, "if Dr. Newman will allow it," and he bowed to the figure seated in the great carved chair. "Here's a health to the armies of the Commonwealth," and with a laugh he drained the cup.

A murmur of anger ran across the room, and the headmaster rose quickly to his feet. But before he could interpose, Hugh Wyndham had dashed the tankard from the speaker's lips, and his adversary had turned immediately on him.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," came a stern voice from the dais, "I think you forget you are my guests. Is this the example which old Sherbornians come back to set the school? Wyndham and Trenchard, this is not the place for brawling. Remember, please, I will have no politics here."

The two boys, both big fellows, on the verge of manhood, and old rivals in the school which they had lately left, paused before their host's appeal, and a third figure hastened to throw himself between.

"We don't want civil war in Sherborne anyhow," he cried with a good-humoured laugh, as he leaped on the bench between the two adversaries, with a hand on the shoulder of each. "My song is next on the list, sir. May I sing it?" And without waiting for permission he started the old Latin refrain with which Sherborne boys of the seventeenth century were wont to make the rafters of their ancient monastery ring.

"That dark young Virginian has got more sense than most of them," whispered one of the masters in Dr. Newman's ears.

“ Trust Johnny Erle to keep a head on his shoulders,” the head-master nodded, as his smile returned.

The familiar doggerel with its ringing chorus quickly restored the company’s good-humour, and the long benches took it up and shouted it, with emphasis enough to wake the weariest abbot sleeping underneath the flags below. Supper went on; public troubles were forgotten; and only the good-fellowship of schoolboys keeping a time-honored anniversary reigned inside the beautiful old room. Outside, under the shadow of the minster, passers-by stopped to listen with a smile; and boys of an order less exalted than the scholars of King Edward’s famous school gathered and stared, irreverently envious of the inspiring merriment within. One or two, of a more intrepid nature, perhaps dimly hoping for a riot or a row—for an internecine warfare raged unendingly between the young bloods of the grammar school and their rivals of the street—crept up, and climbing on the stone-work peered in at the windows of the hall, grimacing through the panes like counterparts of the old monkish gargoyle overhead. These visitors, however, slipped away, as the noise of the singing subsided, and when the party broke up, few loiterers remained. Only, as the boys of the school streamed out, and the elders lingered for the head-master to come down from the dais at the end, Hugh Wyndham thought that he saw a face outside—the face of a man in middle life, tanned and lined and weary—peering through the ivy that overhung the panes. As Dr. Newman passed, Hugh touched his elbow, and the head-master’s eyes followed the boy’s.

“ Isn’t there some one there, sir ? ” asked Wyndham. And the older man hesitated before he replied.

“ No, I think not,” he said at last deliberately, but he gazed rather hard at the window as he spoke. Then he

turned to the young men round him. "Now, you all know the way to your quarters," he added; "and I am sure I needn't ask old schoolfellows to remember that they can have no cause of quarrel here."

With that he passed on, and his guests, some twenty young fellows, schoolboys no more, who had assembled there that evening to celebrate one of the anniversaries of their old school, broke up into groups and wandered out into the September night.

Wyndham linked his arm in the American's (for so they all called Johnny Erle), who had come back over seas from Virginia, to learn, as his father had done before him, syntax and self-respect at Sherborne School. Wyndham and Erle, different as they were in mind and body, the one fair, deliberate, almost insolently calm, the other quick and humorously restless, and dark to extreme swarthiness in face; different, too, as they were in their destinies, the one designed for a Somersetshire landlord, the other for a far-off Virginia squire, belonged to families which had long been allied together, and all through their school-days the two had been staunch friends. Erle's parents had died in his boyhood, and his estate in the great Western Colony—"with all its tribe of niggers, from whom he borrows his complexion," as Hugh's excessive candour would explain—was being carefully nursed by trustees who knew the value of the uninvaded woodlands which King Charles had granted to the boy's father with a careless hand.

Meanwhile for six years, six of the stormiest years in English history, Johnny had found free quarters with his uncle, Canon Erle, in an old red-brick house in Salisbury Close; and the day was drawing near when he must return across the waters and take up the duties of his Virginian home. Thrown for six years into the company of English

schoolboys in the latter days of the great English civil war—his greatest friend, Hugh Wyndham, a hot Royalist, his uncle, a Canon of the fallen Church—Johnny inevitably became a King's man, a Prelatist and Malignant, in the jargon of the day. But there was nothing at all prelatical, and certainly nothing malignant in Johnny's easy talk and merry smile ; and his love of fairness often made him argue as a Roundhead, except when there were Roundheads by.

But even men who cared little for politics were deeply stirred that week by public news. For it was little more than a month since King Charles in person—the new King Charles so lately crowned at Scone—had entered England with a Scottish army, leaving Cromwell and his Ironsides behind ; and, in spite of all the vigilance of the authorities, many a gentleman of the western counties had slipped away to join the Royal forces, as they marched quickly south. For a week past, rumours had been pouring into Sherborne of a great fight at Worcester which all men agreed had taken place—rumours which every hour grew more depressing for those who, like most of the townsfolk of Sherborne, had hoped against hope for the triumph of the King. Some at first had said that Cromwell had been routed. Some had held out for days and sworn the battle was proceeding still. But all the later and authentic tidings pointed to a great disaster to the Royal cause. Dr. Newman, whose sympathies upon that side were noted, though his expression of them was carefully restrained, and whose boys were Royalists in the proportion of four or five to one, did all that he could to quiet the excitement, and insisted on holding the gathering, fixed by long custom, for that day. But all men's minds were strained, and most in Sherborne troubled, and Wyndham's song and Trenchard's frank defiance had fallen on their audience like sparks upon a powder-cask.

"Did you see that face at the window, Johnny?" asked Wyndham, as he led his friend away.

"No. Whose was it? A ghost's or an urchin's?"

"Well, it looked to me uncommonly like a ghost's."

"Sorry I missed it then, for we don't have them in Virginia. It takes a century or two for ghosts to grow."

"And it looked still more," said Hugh, dropping his voice and disregarding this flippancy, "like the face of Peters, my cousin Robert Wyndham's man, who rode off with him from Pilsdon to join the King a couple of weeks ago."

"O-ho, there's some spirit in that apparition. Let us go and look round, Hugh, for traces of your man."

But the two friends searched in vain. There were no figures lurking underneath the windows or in the shadows of the buttresses and walls. The boys had dispersed with a rapidity which only boyhood knows. Even the loiterers from the street had vanished, being drawn off into the town by rumours of fresh tidings from the war. And in the market-place an angry quarrel was proceeding between the Commonwealth's noisy and triumphant partisans, and their far more numerous opponents, who had lost hope and were unsupported by authority, but who yet were determined to postpone to the last possible moment any open recognition of the King's defeat.

Wyndham and Erle strolled up into the town and watched with zest the hubbub reigning there. At every corner groups of men were eagerly debating, and the roadway was blocked by the crowd. Suddenly in the distance a cry rang out above the murmur of voices. The sound of horses galloping hard came near. The people in the street ceased talking, turned, listened, and then began to sway this way and that, making a passage for the oncoming riders to pass

by. And as the tide of bystanders rolled back, leaving a narrow channel for the horsemen, Wyndham and Erle took in the situation at a glance. Two Cavaliers were spurring into the town for shelter, trying desperately to outdistance the half-dozen troopers of the Commonwealth by whom they were pursued. Their jaded horses were covered with dust and spotted with blood and foam, but still they strained gallantly forward, responding to their riders' need. And the riders themselves were in little better plight, their dress disordered, their faces pale and set, their eyes glancing to right and left for a possibility of escape as they came on.

The leader, who rode bare-headed, was much the younger of the two, and the great red scar on his forehead and the arm in a sling at his side accounted for the exhaustion of his looks. But his knees gripped his saddle bravely, and he still kept his body upright. The other, who rode a yard or two behind him, was an older man, less bespattered and disabled, but no less wearied and distressed. Indeed, the younger man seemed anxious for his companion's safety; for, as he came on, he kept glancing back over his shoulder, to make sure that his comrade was there. An excited murmur ran through the onlookers, whose sympathies for the most part were with the Cavaliers.

"Poor lad," cried one, as the first rider dashed forward. "He's suffered enough already. Pity that he should be taken after all!"

But Hugh Wyndham was gripping his friend's shoulder, and his eyes were starting out of his head.

"Why, that's Robert," he cried, "Robert Wyndham, my cousin! I'd swear to him anywhere."

As he spoke, the leading horseman was close on him. In a flash the two cousins had recognized each other. In another flash the two fugitives had gone by.



"Glancing back, to make sure his companion was there "

"Johnny, they mustn't be taken," cried Hugh; and simultaneously the boys glanced round for help.

The pursuers were still some hundred yards away. At Erle's elbow was a heavy waggon, drawn up alongside the pavement, with a couple of big horses in the shafts. In an instant Johnny was dragging at their bridles, and Hugh had seized the carter's whip and was flogging the horses with a will. The great beasts started and plunged. The waggon lurched forward. At once a dozen willing hands, whose owners had guessed the boys' intention, were helping their design. As the leader of the pursuing troopers clattered up to the spot, shouting out and demanding a passage, he was compelled to rein up suddenly, till his horse reared and almost fell back; for right across the road lay the great waggon with its horses plunging in the shafts, and behind and around it the crowd was effectually blocking the approaches, while to all appearance endeavouring to clear the obstruction away. In vain the troopers, exasperated beyond endurance, for they had had a sharp ride across country and had seen the fugitives almost in their grasp, laid about them, and backed into the people on the pavement, and drew yells from the startled bystanders, and roared back imprecations in reply. Every moment the confusion grew more hopeless, and the chances of getting through it more remote. When at last the horses in the waggon were reduced to order and the obstruction cleared away—a work in which none more conspicuously exerted themselves than a pair of merry-eyed youths well-known to Sherborne School—the two Cavaliers had long been lost sight of in the lower portion of the town, and the angry troopers could only ride on muttering objurgations, in search of a prey which had completely disappeared. And then it occurred to the principal promoters

of the mischief that the best thing they could do perhaps was to disappear as well.

It was late before the party of old Sherborne boys, staying at the head-master's house, turned in to bed that night. They had sat up together, telling old tales, recounting old adventures, recalling old affections which not even years efface, and avoiding steadily any recurrence to politics or any mention of the episode in which Wyndham and Erle had been engaged, till their host sent a message to suggest to them that, if their beds were left all night untenanted, his sense of hospitality would feel a little hurt. Spurred by that reminder, our friends at last left their companions, and finding their room together, slept as only lads upon the eve of manhood can. But in the small hours of a rare September morning Hugh Wyndham woke up, astonished to find a dark figure at his bedside.

"Why, Peters," he said sleepily, recognizing the strange visitor. "Is that Peters, or a burglar, or a dream?"

"It's me right enough, Mr. Hugh," said the figure ungrammatically.

"By thy grammar I should know thee," Hugh murmured, as most unwillingly he rose. "Is it my life that you are wanting, Peters, or merely the head-master's spoons?"

"You're delirious, sir," said Peters shortly. "I would ask you to wake kindly, for I've something important to say."

Wyndham sprang up, gathered a sponge, and launched it at Erle's head.

"Wake kindly, John," he called, then burst out laughing at Erle's sudden start and at the consternation in the servant's face. But his manner changed in a moment, as he realized that Peters' anxiety was real.

"What is it, Peters?" he asked more gravely. "You

can speak out freely, for Mr. Erle is an honest man, and he helped your master gallantly last night."

"I know, sir; it's not Mr. Erle I'm afraid of."

"Oh, it's me, is it?" and Wyndham laughed again.

"It's the noise, sir. I don't want to wake the house."

"You had better let me manage this business, Hugh," interposed Johnny Erle, who had roused himself and taken in the situation with composure, and was already slipping on his clothes. "Now"—he addressed Peters—"tell us what you want and how you got in here."

"I've come, sir, to take Mr. Hugh to see his cousin who's in hiding in the park. And I came here through the pantry window, which I got in and unlocked last night."

In a moment Hugh was gravity itself, and dressing as rapidly as the most impatient could desire.

"I'm ready, Peters," he said directly. "May Mr. Erle come too?"

Peters nodded, and without further parley the two boys followed the man out of the room, stole noiselessly along the corridors, and made their way out of the sleeping house. Even in the streets they asked few questions, but left Peters to tell them, in such scraps of information as he would vouchsafe, of the disastrous fight at Worcester, of the rout of the Royalists, of the narrow escape of Capt. Robert Wyndham, of his chance reunion with his present companion, of their encounter with the troopers and their desperate flight the day before, and of his own visit to Sherborne in the darkness, to try to find Hugh and so to communicate with his master's friends.

"The Captain has got a comrade with him now, sir, about whom he's far more anxious than he is about himself. They call him Mr. Morton;" and he looked up with a twinkle in his eye.

But the young men listened and reserved their questions with a patience that did credit to their sense. The day was just dawning, and the town was still asleep, as their guide led them across it into the park of the great house that lay beyond.

Sherborne Castle had weathered many a storm and challenged many a leaguer, since the Norman Knight on whom the Conqueror bestowed it repaired its Saxon buttresses and raised new towers upon its Saxon walls. When the old Knight, as years grew thick upon him, exchanged his battle axe for a crozier and replaced with a bishop's mitre the helmet which his stout old head had worn so long, he made over his Castle to the Bishopric which he filled, and furthermore laid such a curse on any man who should dare to take it from the Church again, that for generations no layman could enjoy it with an easy conscience. The curse, it is sad to relate, did not prevent laymen from laying hands upon it; but it never failed to exact an exemplary revenge. Stephen was the first offender to steal the castle from the Bishopric; and, King as he was, he promptly lost a son. The Montacute Earls of Salisbury possessed it, and were shortly afterwards extinguished by a diversity of dreadful deaths. The great Duke of Somerset, first patron of the grammar-school and first Protector of the realm of England, acquired it, and, as was only to be expected, lost his head. Sir Walter Raleigh gained it from his mistress, and built a modern house, a Lodge, beside it, and brought thither his rare vitality, his tireless, passionate enterprise, his high designs; but Sir Walter died as Somerset had died before him. Prince Henry followed Raleigh as its master, only to follow Raleigh to the grave. Another Somerset, more ignoble, succeeded, and immediately ruin overtook him too. And now, in 1651, its master, Lord Bristol, was an

exile, banished and dispossessed. So had the ancient cures pursued its vengeance and invoked misfortune on the despoilers of the Church.

In the Civil War the famous old Castle had for long defied the forces of the Parliament, and after its capture by the Lord General Fairfax it had been demolished by order of the Commons, and many of its stones had been carted away. Only the old gatehouse had been left standing, and near it one of the four great towers and a few huge broken fragments of the wall. In a corner of the gate-house two or three rooms were roughly furnished, and one of these had afforded shelter to the two fugitive Royalists that night.

Young Captain Wyndham was sitting on a low trundle-bed, and his companion was standing at the window pulling aside the curtain which shut out the dawn. A candle still guttered on the table, and the arms of the two Cavaliers and the remnants of a hasty meal lay there. Both men were dressed in shirts and breeches, and a cloak covered Wyndham's wounded arm. But both looked rather haggard and uncared-for, and bore unmistakable traces of fatigue. As their visitors entered, they turned to greet them, and Robert Wyndham held out his hand and smiled.

Hugh crossed the room impulsively and grasped it; and his cousin winced as he replied. But he stared hard at Johnny Erle.

“ Well, Hugh, I thought we should find you in Sherborne yesterday, and I’m heartily glad we did. For without you and your friend there, we should be prisoners now. It’s Mr. Erle, isn’t it? I’ve heard of him at Trent.”

Johnny advanced, and the elder man at the window stepped forward and joined the group.

“ My friend, Mr. Morton, from Worcester,” said the

Captain quickly. "It's on his account, Hugh, that we're waiting here."

"And he wishes to thank two brave gentlemen in person for the readiest help which he ever received," Morton added, as he shook both boys warmly by the hand. But he scanned Erle's face and figure with a very curious glance, and then looked across to Robert Wyndham who nodded slightly back to him. "I have seen some one very like Mr. Erle before."

"But tell us about yourself, Robert," Hugh pleaded. "How do you come here, and what have you done?"

"Oh, there's nothing to tell," his cousin answered sadly, "nothing but the black news which all the world knows now. The King's cause is ruined and his army destroyed."

"And the King himself?"

"God knows!"

"He's not dead?"

"No, nor even wounded," interposed Morton. "Don't be too dismal, Wyndham. His Majesty is in hiding. But he has friends enough left, God willing, to help him to safety yet."

"Was it a stiff fight?" asked Johnny shyly.

"It was the hottest fight I ever remember," Morton answered, "and I've been in something like a score. Our men fought on till night hid them from the enemy and the streets ran with blood. Leslie, the Covenanting General, is taken. Hamilton, the leader of the Scottish Royalists, is dead."

"And thousands of brave fellows with him for certain," added Captain Wyndham.

"And thousands more broken and wounded and disheartened," rejoined Morton with obstinate cheerfulness, "but for all that, certain to get well."

"You're wounded too, Robert; we must get you home and have you nursed at Pilsdon," said Hugh, naming the house where his uncle, Sir Hugh Wyndham, the Captain's father, lived.

"No, I can't go home at present, Hugh. They would be certain to search Pilsdon for me, and I should only bring trouble on them there. But sit down, all of you, and I'll tell you what I mean to do. We've got three chairs in this apartment." And with reviving energies the Captain rose.

As he spoke, the sun shone in at the window, and the candle-end upon the table guttered out. At the same moment Peters, who had quietly absented himself, reentered with a tray of provisions which he ceremoniously laid out, and Morton, throwing himself upon his knees by the forsaken grate, set to work, with Johnny's prompt assistance, to kindle a fire in the uncomfortable room.

It is wonderful what food and fire will do. Ten minutes later, the disconsolate little party were forgetting their woes in the warmth and the sunlight, and Johnny Erle, who could ill bear to be serious for long together, had even ventured on an unassuming joke.

"What I propose is this, Hugh," the Captain told his cousin. "I shall get down to Lyme, where ships are handy, and seek out Mr. Ellesdon, who I'm told is a good fellow and likely to take me in. It's not so far from Pilsdon but that I can send over a message to let them know I'm safe, and once in Lyme there's not much danger for me. But with Mr. Morton things are different. It's most important that he should not be taken, and that he should find his way, as soon as possible, to Trent."

"I'm sure my father will be proud to have him for a guest," said Hugh.

"I know he will be, and Trent's an old house with snug

corners where an honest man can easily lie hid. I want you to take Mr. Morton there, Hugh, as quickly and as secretly as you can."

" You can count on me, Robert, and on my people too."

" One can generally count on a Dorset gentleman for loyalty," said Morton smiling.

" Well, Trent's in Somerset, just over the border," Hugh answered, smiling back. " But I think we're as staunch as anybody here. When do we start, Robert?"

" As soon as Peters will let us."

" Your carriage will be at the gate directly, sir," said Peters gravely; " and your dresses I have here."

" Carriage and dresses, Peters?" asked the Captain, in perplexity.

" Peters is a fairy godmother," said Morton. " I have long ceased to feel surprised at anything he may provide. If the carriage seems at first sight to be a pumpkin, I shall get into it without a qualm."

" There's a man waiting to see your Honours," Peters went on stolidly. " He's an honest fellow, who has been for years in my Lord Bristol's service."

" You can trust him?"

" I think so, sir. I arranged things with him last night."

" Show him in then."

The door opened, and a burly fellow entered the room. In his arms he carried a bundle almost as big as himself, from which Peters solemnly extracted a series of garments, which he laid out on the floor before his wondering audience. There was a plain cloth suit, such as gentlemen of the Puritan persuasion adopted.

" That," said Peters, " is for Mr. Morton."

Morton grimaced. " Introduce me to your tailor, Morton," murmured the Captain under his breath.

“This,” Peters went on, “is for Captain Wyndham ;” and he displayed a smock frock, a red wig, and a labourer’s hat.

The others burst out laughing. “ My dear fellow,” said Morton, “ you really must excuse me; but my tailor wouldn’t know a man who dressed like that.”

“ I’d sooner be a rustic than a Roundhead any day,” retorted Wyndham.

“ And so say I, sir,” interposed the big farmer suddenly; “ I should like to shake your Honour’s hand for that.” And Wyndham, stepping forward, grasped his big fingers hard.

“ Is there no disguise for the rest of us, Peters ?” asked Hugh with an air of disappointment.

“ I thought you would just go as a young gentleman, sir,” said Peters haltingly, and Johnny burst into a laugh.

“ Quite right, Peters ; that will be disguise enough.”

“ No, no, sir,” the man hastened to explain, but floundered ; “ I meant as a plain gentleman from Sherborne School.”

The others laughed the more, but Hugh rose to the occasion. “ A plain gentleman, Peters ?” he asked with dignity. “ Certainly no one would recognize me as that.”

“ And when we’re got up in this finery,” enquired the Captain, “ what’s to be the next step then ?”

“ I thought, sir,” explained Peters, “ that it was the best way of getting through the town. There’s a waggon of hay standing at the gate ; our friend here has lent it and I’m to drive it in his name. There’s a labourer’s smock and boots for me too, sir, and perhaps you and Mr. Morton would lie under the hay.”

“ Oh, thank you, thank you,” ejaculated Morton.

“ And the two young gentlemen would sit outside.”

“ And drum with our heels,” suggested Johnny, “ on the hay below.”

"If anybody asked, sir"—Peters continued, calmly unfolding his design—"they could say that they came from the School, and wanted to get home early, and that I was giving them a lift. And then, as soon as we're clear of the town, Mr. Hugh could take Mr. Morton across the fields to Trent—it's no great walk—and the rest of us could jog along to Lyme."

"It's a good scheme, Wyndham," said Morton briskly, "and I for one am quite ready to try it."

"It does you credit, Peters," his master added, "if our friend here is really good enough to lend his waggon for the job."

"You're heartily welcome, master," said the burly farmer, blushing like a boy. "Any friend of King Charles is welcome to all the help that I can give."

"Then there's nothing for it but to dress and be off," said Morton. "King Charles' followers are lucky to find such friends. You've seen to our horses, Peters?"

"Yes, sir, they're stabled with friends who will keep them till your Honours can take them away."

"Good! Where's that coat? Henceforward I'm a Ranter. Back with you, Malignants, and don't crowd round the Elect." Morton's intonation of a snuffling rogue was perfect. "Prithee, friend Jonathan Erle, stretch forth thy hand and twitch towards me those habiliments which the ungodly term small clothes."

It was short work and merry work dressing. Hugh and Johnny were sorry to be left out. The glory of Morton's snuffle paled before Captain Wyndham's Dorsetshire accent, and the carrotty wig of the rustic was voted superior to the Puritan's steeple-crowned hat. Descending to the gateway, the two fugitives were packed tenderly into the body of the waggon, and the two boys were perched up

aloft. Peters drove off in a style that any carter might have envied, and the kindly farmer chuckled deeply as he waved his good-bye from the steps. They passed through the town, now slowly waking. They passed the school porter swinging back the gates, and Hugh took the opportunity of attracting his attention with a shout.

“We’re off early, Sam,” he called, in answer to that functionary’s stare of surprise. “Got a lift in this waggon, as we want to breakfast at home. I’ll write and explain to the Doctor. Ask them to send our things on, when they can, to Trent.”

The porter merely nodded. He had long ceased to question the vagaries of old Sherborne boys. On they jolted till the houses were behind them, and the quiet meadows spread out on every side. Presently, at a crossroad, Peters drew up under a lofty hedge, and the boys jumped down and pulled the hay aside.

“We get out here, Mr. Morton,” Hugh suggested. “Johnny’s going to see my cousin into Lyme.”

Morton climbed out, took a long breath, and brushed his clothes. Then he leaned towards the Captain. “Thanks again, many times over, Wyndham. I shall hear of you at Trent.”

“And you’ll let me know if I can help. Lyme is a port, remember,” said Wyndham, eagerly.

“I won’t fail. Take care of your wound meanwhile.”

The two friends shook hands warmly. The boys shouted a few words to each other. Peters cracked his whip and the waggon jolted on. Hugh stood with his companion watching it till the hedges interposed between, and then, while the birds sang in the dewy thickets round them, he led the way across the fields to Trent.

CHAPTER II

AMONG THE DORSET DOWNS

THERE are few territories of the West to which its sons return more lovingly than the far-ranging sweep of breezy valleys, where the bold Dorset uplands break and tumble to the sea. There, in deep hollows, which entrap the sunshine, the spring bursts sooner, the flowers bloom earlier than elsewhere. There, in low woods and happy quiet gardens, the birds sing longer and the summer lingers later undismayed. The villages, which stoop towards the streams so shyly, the bridges, where graceless boys at perilous angles peer for the hiding-places of the trout, are enlivened by ale-houses as humble, shielded by churches as ancient as themselves. The hills, which rear their heads above so steeply, have watched unchangingly a thousand battles and have stood sentinels above a thousand camps. There the old Romans, who found no fastnesses impregnable where Cæsar's servants chose to climb, drove with enduring patience their immortal roads. There the old Saxons swept an older race before them, and then wheeled round undaunted to repel the Danes. There Norman monks from many a royal abbey, turning their backs on a disordered world, set up their simple litany of work and prayer, and on the broad lands surrendered to them by piety or superstition or remorse, built towers whose bells still peal in intercession, aisles where the winds only sing litanies to-day. And there too many a brave and loyal race, whose name is written in honourable records or carved on the lintels of old

manor doors, has risen and fallen, held its head high in fortune and faced adversity without reproach, as time passed over it and centuries moved on.

Of such a race was William Ellesdon, who rode along the downs exultingly one September afternoon. Ellesdon's inheritance had fallen to him in the stiff clay of those inhospitable hills, whose furrows almost break the farmer's heart. But he loved with the love of an exile every acre of the prospect at his feet, the yellow fields, the green slopes of the upland, the crimson roofs behind the wind-blown trees, and the deep blue of the over-arching sky-line where Golden Cap rose in the sunshine and Hadden Hill bowed to the sea. True, the old house which had been a home to his fathers, had slipped like its owners into decay, and was shared between a bailiff and a shepherd now, while Ellesdon occupied a lodging which overlooked the cobb at Lyme. But it was surprising how little that mattered to a lad of twenty-three, a lad of straight limbs and firm muscles and of eyes as clear as the dawn, unspoiled in heart, unsoiled in conscience, stranger to all the ills to which the old are heirs.

What did Ellesdon care for his ancestors' reverses so long as he could ride at evening over turf where the sea-winds sang, so long as he could banish his farmers' forebodings with a laugh as happy as a boy's, exchange a smile with labourers at the harvest, whistle a greeting to the shepherd-lads above, or read, as he passed, in the faces of his people, a reflection of the gladness that shone out of his own? What mattered a shrunken rent-roll, and the pinch of bills for repairs, or even the shadow of fine and forfeiture which still hung over it all? How could any man, with boyhood only just behind him and the unconquered Kingdoms of the World in front, think of anything else on such an even-

ing except the joy of living and the glory of the English land, the scents of the winds and the woodlands, and the sweep of heaven above? Shadows and bills—let them wait for the winter; and with a touch of the spur he invited the breezes to blow them away.

Ellesdon pulled up his horse on a ridge further westward, where the grass track fell steeply to the road. He was now beyond the borders of his property and drawing nearer Lyme. At his feet, in a shallow valley scooped out of the heart of the downs, lay an old farmhouse, looking like the palace in the legend, bewitched by sleep that summer afternoon. The door, under the crimson rose-tree which embowered it, stood open; but nobody came out. The gate at the end of the red-brick path beset with boxwood, swung back; but nobody passed through. The yards, the barns, the milking-sheds were empty; from the height where he looked down on them the whole plan of the little home-stead was unfolded to his gaze. A collie-dog slept in the forecourt. A few ducks slept on the pond. Voices of men in the fields somewhere there might have been; but no men were visible, and the sound was too faint to disturb the universal calm. A horse, which looked as if he had been ridden hard and far that day, was tethered to a gate-post near. But he stood as quiet as the buildings around.

“What a picture of sleep,” said Ellesdon to himself, smiling. “It only wants the Beauty and the Prince.”

As he spoke there came round a corner a young girl in a big white apron carrying a pan. Even at that distance he could judge of the grace of her movements, and mark in the sunshine the radiance of her hair. She carried her pan of cream slowly through the gateway and up the garden-walk, and set it down on a table which stood outside the house. But as she bent over the table, a man’s figure

emerged from the doorway behind, a tall, young, gallant-looking figure, with a riding switch in its hand. And the girl turned, startled, and her laugh broke out in echoes which floated up to Ellesdon's feet.

"Jove! I'm sure I know that laugh," he muttered.

The man stepped forward into the sunlight, and suddenly Ellesdon realized how slight and boyish-looking for all his height he was. Then the light fell full on the lad's features, and a low whistle broke from Ellesdon's lips.

"Why, that's young Trenchard, of Wylde Court," he added. "He's too young to be playing the hero, even in a fairy-tale."

Very unwillingly he turned his horse about. He could not remain an eavesdropper, now that he knew who one at least of the performers in the little drama was. But his horse, which was not so sensitive, fidgeted and backed a moment, so that even Ellesdon's loyalty could not help one more glance below. The boy had been angered by the girl's laughter for an instant, but she had ceased to laugh and had drawn closer to him now, and had laid an appealing hand upon his sleeve, with a look he would have been adamant to resist.

And the boy was not adamant, but young, hot-blooded, his new-found manhood insurgent and aflame, his pulses stirred, his strong heart moved so strangely by the bewitching beauty of the maid. Her head, so tall was she, surmounted his tall shoulder. His eyes looked almost on a level into those deep wells of hers; and somewhere in their depths he found contending such spirits of mockery, tenderness, and mirth, as might well have shaken older nerves than his. He caught at her hand, and she yielded it easily to him. He drew her still nearer, and almost as readily she came. Incontinently then her laugh once more provoked

him ; and the boy, stooping, flung his arms about her, and from her lips exacted his revenge.

In another moment Ellesdon had turned his back upon them, and with grave brows was riding down the ridge and out of sight. But as he rode, his frown had gone, his face was smiling, and presently he lifted up his head and sighed. When he raised his eyes, they fell upon a waggon moving along the road across the downs in front, a road which converged into the track which he was following in the direction of the little port of Lyme. But the waggon was still a long way distant. Ellesdon did not guess that it or its occupants were any particular concern of his ; and besides, he had higher things than waggon-loads to think of as the sun went down on that fair September afternoon.

It was not very long since William Ellesdon had come back to live among his people and to take up his duties there. Like Johnny Erle, his cousin, he was a nephew of the dear old Canon who lived in Salisbury Close, and had friends and connections all through the countryside. But compared with the turbulent days of his boyhood, he had found a strange peace reigning in the land. For Ellesdon was old enough to remember vividly the stir and confusion of the Civil War, the swift triumphs of Prince Maurice and Goring, the proud marching songs of their men, the intrepid fights, the stubborn sieges, in which his father had played a gallant part. He was old enough to remember also the ruined homes and desolated fields, the tale of loss and suffering never ending, the unbelievable rumour and at last the black conviction of defeat. Major Ellesdon, his father, had been one of the many loyal gentlemen who came into the King's camp with a heavy heart, who dreaded the war as a national calamity, and to the last, like Lord Spencer, " were it not for grinning honour," would gladly

have "found occasion to retire," and who, like Falkland, as they rode from battle-field to battle-field, never ceased to pray for peace. But he fought for his cause no less bravely because he understood his master's faults, and stayed by it all the more staunchly when he found his master's fortunes sink and fail.

When at last Major Ellesdon fell at Newbury, and his widow, who had loved him, drooped and died, an old cousin stepped in and offered the boy a home ; and in this cousin's house, near Guildford, Willie had passed the intervening years. The old cousin had been something of a rebel, in sympathy if not in act, and there was about his household a tenderness for treason and a certain austerity of habit and of dress, which had at first roused the boy's anger and dismay. But with it there had mingled such quick and quiet kindness, so fine a sense of duty, and so large a sympathy for other views, that even the boy's hot royalism had dimly learned to see another side, and to wonder if even the best of causes were all white, or the worst all black. This was not the temper to please the fiercest partisans ; and on Ellesdon's return to Dorsetshire, some of his old friends shook their heads over his talk. But one's oldest friends are not always the wisest. Ellesdon was now of an age to judge for himself ; and his bearing, his youth, and his genial manliness quickly won for him the liking of the young, while his deeper qualities gained for him the respect of elder men.

"You've a Round head on Royalist shoulders, Will," his uncle, the Canon, would say, with his whimsical, deprecating smile.

"But I'll go straight in the old ways, uncle, so long as the shoulders don't get round too," Ellesdon would laugh in reply. And then Johnny, if he were there, would chuckle quietly, and the Canon would lay a hand on the

stalwart shoulders, and smile at the Virginian and the Englishman alike, and beg Willie to come over again to Salisbury as soon as he could find the time.

Presently, a wild halloo rang out across the downs. For some time past Ellesdon had been drawing nearer to the solitary waggon as it jolted on its way, and once and again he had glanced indifferently towards it, as his eyes swept the landscape round. But now some rascal on the top of it was shouting to him with a freedom unusual in those semi-feudal days; and Ellesdon, who had his share of pride, reined up and stared back rather loftily. The shout was immediately repeated, and wondering, but with marked deliberation, Ellesdon advanced.

As he came nearer, he observed that the shout proceeded from a dark-faced figure, which appeared to be waving its cap towards him with a familiarity that would not be denied. Yet the waggon was unmistakably a farm waggon of the humbler kind.

“Who on earth”—began Ellesdon. “Why, that’s a boy’s figure, surely. I suppose he’s shouting at me. It’s very like Johnny Erle.”

And it was still more like Johnny Erle, as he advanced; and it was clearly Johnny Erle’s voice which assailed him by his various titles in stentorian tones.

“Will-ie—Ellesdon—Cap-tain—Elles-don—Squi-re—Elles-don—ahoy—ahoy—a-hoy!” Ellesdon bore locally a variety of designations, for besides his acres, he owned a ship or two at Lyme. He glanced round to make sure that no one was by to mock him, and then in the same vein shouted his reply :

“John-nie Erle—School-boy Erle—Vir-gin-i-an—planter Erle—a-hoy!”

The waggon stopped, and Ellesdon trotted up to it

“Whom have you there, Johnny, and what in the name of all the Colonies are you doing with him?” he asked, as his eyes ran over the astonishing red-headed yokel seated at Erle’s feet in the cart.

“A young agricultural friend of mine, whom I’ve brought over to stay with you,” Johnny explained, with a wave of the hand towards Wyndham’s remarkable figure, and a wink to the impassive Peters on the driver’s seat. “I heard you wanted a land-agent, Willie, and you’ll see at a glance that my friend reeks of the land as much as any one could wish.”

“I see at a glance that some one is fooling,” Ellesdon answered. “But how many are involved in it I’m not so sure.”

“I am returning from a festivity at Sherborne,” began Johnny.

“That may help to account for it,” Ellesdon interposed.

“And I offered a lift to my friend in my carriage, because he’d made himself a little unpopular at home.” He dropped his voice to an impressive whisper. “You see, Willie, his complexion is against him, and his hair —”

“Yes, I was noticing his hair,” retorted Ellesdon, whose eyes had been examining the yokel closely. “Excuse me, sir,” and bending forward suddenly, he twitched off Wyndham’s over-shadowing red wig.

Wyndham leaped to his feet in a moment, and his hand sought for the hilt which was no longer at his side. But Johnny interposed at once.

“My fault, Captain Wyndham. You’ll forgive the joke, I’m certain. Willie, this, as you see, is a gentleman in trouble, for whom we’ve come to ask your help.”

“Then I’m sure I beg his pardon,” said Ellesdon genially. “You’ll confess, sir, my cousin’s way of introducing

us was some excuse for my impertinence. Did you say Captain Wyndham, Johnny?"

"Yes, Capt. Robert Wyndham, of Pilsdon, a fugitive from Worcester, where he's been serving for the King."

Ellesdon held out his hand at once. "Then indeed he is most welcome. Any help that I can give him, Captain Wyndham may command."

Wyndham shook his hand warmly. "The fact is, Mr. Ellesdon," he said, "I can't safely go home at present, and my friends suggested that you would perhaps enable me to lie quiet for a while in Lyme."

"You couldn't have come to a better quarter. And at the worst, I've a ship or two handy, which will put you beyond the reach of Cromwell's troopers, if need be. I've often met Sir Hugh, your father, and young Hugh, Johnny's friend, is an old ally of mine."

"And what is more, Willie," added Erle, "I answer for him; so that no further introduction seems to be required."

But Wyndham had to tell the whole story of Worcester fight and of his adventures since, and to answer many a question about the unfortunate young King, as they turned the horses' heads, and Ellesdon rode beside the waggon towards Lyme.

"There'll be a hue and cry all over the country," said Ellesdon, "till His Majesty gets safe across the seas. God preserve him! I should like to have a hand in it, but I can't wish to see him here. They're on the alert everywhere already. There were troopers about this morning in the villages and on the roads. But we'll manage to keep you snug, Captain Wyndham, and to send word to Pilsdon too. Jove! I'd have given a lot to have stood in your shoes the last week or two."

"They're not much of shoes to look at," said Wyndham, with a laugh at his hob-nailed boots.

"And Willie, like me, is half a Roundhead," added Johnny; "at least so every one says."

"It's the other half, then, which is uppermost, Johnny, in both of us just now."

They jogged on, joking and laughing, and making plans the while, sobered every now and then into gravity, if not into sadness, by the thought of public things. It was growing dusk as they entered a village only a short distance from Lyme, and halted to give the horses a drink. There were two or three troopers at the near end of the village, lounging round a tavern, so Peters drove past them to the further end before he stopped.

But here a fresh encounter awaited them. They had taken some time, for the waggon moved rather slowly, and the road they had followed curved in unreasonable ways. So that Ellesdon was hardly surprised, as they waited, to see Tom Trenchard ride up—Tom Trenchard whose romance he had discovered so unwillingly that afternoon. The lad, who already bore a commission bestowed on him through his uncle's influence with the Commonwealth as soon as he left school, bore himself well, and looked much older than his nineteen or twenty years. His eyes shone brightly with exercise, and perhaps with deeper things as well. His spirits were high. As he entered the village, the troopers had saluted him; and in his heart he felt more of a man that evening since some one else had saluted him too. He recognized Ellesdon as he passed him; then stopped, surprised to find Erle perched upon a waggon with a couple of rough farm hands.

"Hullo, Erle?" he said, with a note of enquiry in his voice.

Johnny nodded, as if his situation were the most natural thing in the world.

“A beautiful evening, Trenchard,” he observed.

“Yes, but how do you come here?”

“How? By the road and with the help of horses, like yourself, I suppose, for you were at Sherborne over night.”

“I left early and am riding home now. What are you doing here?”

“As you see. I am watering my flocks and herds,” said Johnny—for Peters was watering his steeds. “In Virginia we keep up patriarchal ways.”

“Yes, but this isn’t Virginia.”

“No, worse luck, it is Dorset, where they have never been taught that curiosity is rude.”

“You’re highly mysterious, youngster. Whom have you with you there?”

“Friends.”

“From Virginia, eh? Red Indians too by their complexion.” And Trenchard leaned over the side of the waggon and lightly touched the red-headed rustic with his whip.

This was more than a Royalist officer could stand. Springing up in the cart, Wyndham seized the whip, twisted it out of its owner’s hands, and laid it twice sharply across Trenchard’s shoulders. The young man’s horse reared and its rider flushed crimson.

“You insolent rascal,” he cried, as he controlled his horse and advanced to the attack.

But John Erle was on his feet in the road by this time, and had caught the bridle of Trenchard’s horse. And Ellesdon, who had been waiting at a little distance, had also interposed; for both knew that they dare not risk a public

quarrel, more especially as the Cromwellian troopers from the tavern were now coming slowly up the road.

“Let me go, let me go, I say,” cried Trenchard hotly. “I won’t stand being struck by a low blackguard like that.”

Without ceremony Johnny turned on Wyndham and twitched the riding-whip out of his hand. “You forgot yourself, my man,” he said sternly, but with a beseeching look in his eyes, and he handed back the whip to its owner with apologies as incoherent as profuse.

But Trenchard was not to be so easily appeased. “Leave go, and I’ll lay it about his shoulders,” he shouted to Ellesdon, who had laid a detaining hand upon his arm; and his horse began plunging again.

“If you do,” said the yokel calmly, in a tone no yokel ever mastered yet, “I’ll pull you from your horse and thrash you where you stand.”

The tone sobered Trenchard in a moment, and he stared hard at the speaker in reply. “That’s no farm labourer,” he burst out angrily: “and by heaven I’ll know who it is.”

“Stop, Mr. Trenchard,” said Ellesdon firmly, “you’ll take my assurance that no insult to you was meant. For this man, Erle and I are responsible, and we can allow no quarrel here.”

“You mistake me, sir; I’ll take no assurance but I’ll know who and what the fellow is. There are too many rascals now flying from justice,” and Trenchard turned towards the soldiers riding up the street.

Ellesdon followed his look with alarm. “It will never do to have the soldiers interposing,” he muttered to Wyndham. “Sit down and try to look more like an oaf.” Then he drew Wyndham’s angry adversary aside.

“Mr. Trenchard, we are men of the world,” he said

gravely. "We don't brawl on the highroad with rustics in a cart."

"That fellow is no rustic."

"Well, I won't try to deceive you. He is, as you suspect, a gentleman in hiding. You won't betray our secret, because you are a gentleman yourself."

"I'm not bound to keep it. He's probably some runaway from Worcester. I've half a mind to hand him over to the troopers here." The soldiers were now almost within hearing, and Ellesdon suddenly bent forward and whispered in his companion's ear.

"Mr. Trenchard, if you betray our secret, I swear upon my honour that I won't keep yours." The boy started. "Do you wish all the world to know what you were doing at the farm in the downs an hour ago?"

Trenchard coloured up hotly. "You weren't there," he stammered in surprise.

"I was riding on the ridge above, and I couldn't help seeing. But your secrets are safe with me, so long as you keep mine in return."

The advancing troopers broke into a trot and clattered up. As they passed Trenchard, they saluted, and he glanced irresolutely around.

"Remember," said Ellesdon sternly; and in silence the young man returned the salute of the troopers, and watched them till they vanished along the dusty road. Then Ellesdon turned to his friends.

"Tell Peters to drive on, Johnny. Mr. Trenchard has accepted our apologies and rides in the other direction. He knows that we all have our secrets, and that gentlemen don't give each other away."

Upon those words the little company parted. Trenchard rode off, not in the best of tempers, towards his home; and

the farm-waggon with its eccentric occupants continued on its way to Lyme.

“A close shave, Will, wasn’t it?” asked Erle of his cousin, as they moved along.

“A very close shave, Johnny, for a minute when the troopers came by. If I hadn’t happened this afternoon to see something which I wasn’t meant to, I think one of His Majesty’s officers would have slept in Dorchester jail to-night.”

No further perils or adventures attended the waggon’s journey into Lyme. The little town where the Commonwealth had very stout supporters, was still in a state of evident excitement over the late campaign. It being market day the streets were full of people eagerly discussing the news, the rout of the Scots at Worcester, Cromwell’s decisive victory, the flight of the Royalist leaders, the disappearance of the King. But guided by Ellesdon, Peters drove through lanes and byways to the former’s little house upon the quay, and there the wounded Captain was bestowed in safety, within sight of the sails which, in case of need, might be relied on to carry him securely over sea.

“You’ll stay with us, a bit, John, won’t you?” said Ellesdon to his cousin. “Or are you bound to get back to Salisbury, to boast of your exploits?”

“Neither, my lad,” John answered. “I’m going back to Trent to join Hugh Wyndham. And in the country which I come from, the vice of boasting is, as you must be well aware, unknown.”

But while the little party at Lyme made merry over their successful journey, Tom Trenchard, who had so nearly spoiled their projects, was listening in moody silence to some plain words of advice—advice which the master of

Wylde Court did not always trouble to offer in the most palatable form to his self-willed and independent heir.

The Trenchards of Wylde Court were a branch of an old family which had figured in the records of the Southern counties from days at least as distant and discredited as John's; and though often impoverished, and more than once uprooted, they had never allowed their neighbours to forget the consequence which was their due. One Trenchard had ruled over tracts of the New Forest and held high jurisdiction in the Isle of Wight, while Henry VI, intent on heavenly diadems, fought his ineffectual fight to keep an earthly crown, and then marrying a Dorset heiress, had settled down at Wolverton in Dorsetshire, as the evil days of an earlier Civil War went by. There at Wolverton the Trenchards still were masters, but in the recent troubles they had thrown in their lot with the victorious side, and the name of Sir Thomas Trenchard of Wolverton was to be found in the notorious list of the commission which had condemned King Charles I to death. Sir Thomas, the head of the family, stood high in the counsels of the Commonwealth; and with his wealth and influence was one of its chief supporters in the countryside. His brother Peter, the Squire of Wylde Court, enjoyed a smaller fortune. In character and tastes he differed widely from the leaders of the dominant party. In private he would sometimes express his opinion of their proceedings with an energy of language which would have startled his political allies. But in politics he went with his brother, espoused the popular side, and brought up his son Tom to be as much of a Roundhead as an old-fashioned country gentleman could tolerate or expect.

Peter Trenchard had inherited from his strong ancestry an iron constitution and ungovernable pride, and both of these qualities he had transmitted in abundant measure to

the son who stood before him, listening ill-pleased to his rough and vigorous advice. There was a curious likeness between them, as they met that evening in the room where the Squire received and reckoned his diminished rents. It was the room where he passed most of the hours that he could not spend in the saddle or in the field, often with no better company than the glass at his elbow and the dogs at his feet, staring perhaps through the narrow leaded windowpanes on to the darkening landscape out of doors, or turning the pages of some heraldic volume that told of the ancient glories of his race, or dreaming moodily, his grim face hardened, his thick black eyebrows drawn into a scowl, of chances missed, affections wasted, in the long wild life behind. For, unlike his elder brother, who, as he sneered, "could whine and snuffle with the wheeziest sectary alive," Peter Trenchard scoffed openly at the "conversions" which had become so frequent among the finer spirits of the Puritan gentry of the day, and though he had taken sides with that party, he cared nothing for the ideas of self-discipline and private reformation which formed the strength and substance of their public creed.

The sun had fallen now below the window sills, but the glow of the daylight lingered yet inside the room, illuminating the low-beamed ceiling and the panelled walls, the blazon of arms carved high over the chimney-piece, the black oak table with the sleeping dogs below, and the figure of the elder man seated, stiff, sardonic, his eyes undimmed for all his sixty years, and fixed with ironic humour on the towering figure of his son, who, riding-whip in hand, bestrode the hearth-rug and gazed back unflinchingly at him.

"So you see, Tom," Mr. Trenchard wound up his jobation, "it's high time that you got some work to do. These are days when a man must bestir himself if he's to keep his

place in the world, and hanging about in summer nights is apt to lead even the godliest of us into mischief, hey?" The Squire never spared a sneer at the lofty professions of his party, if he could get one in.

"I make no pretence to be better than other fellows, sir."

"No, Tom, pretences don't suit you and me."

"But I'm perfectly willing to work, as soon as I get the chance of it. I'm only waiting for orders from the regiment, now."

"I know, and the orders have come. Colonel Morley writes that he has received directions from General Desborough to hurry on the recruiting for the expedition to Jersey. There'll be no more fighting in the Midlands now. He's moving towards Bridport, and wants you to join him without delay."

"Well, I can go to-morrow."

"Got tired of play already?" It seemed as if the old man were determined to provoke him, and as if the lad's ready compliance only encouraged him to persevere.

"I'm ready to work, I tell you, sir, wherever there's work to be done," Tom repeated sullenly.

"You'll have to be ready to make money too, my lad, wherever there's money to be made. For the rents of this old place won't keep so fine a young man for long."

The fine young man answered nothing. But he kicked over a stool at his feet.

"Keep your temper, Tom; keep your temper," said the Squire with a short laugh.

"Then do you keep your taunts, sir, at least till you've some better reason to vent them on me." And with this outbreak the lad strode towards the door.

But his father's sardonic humour was satisfied now that he

had thoroughly exasperated his son, and he rose alertly and gripped the latter's arm.

"Can't a man have his joke in these days," he asked with a chuckle, "without fear of offending his son? Come, Tom, you and I won't quarrel, because you're going to do some work for the first time in your life. They won't let you overdo it." And with a hand on his companion's shoulder he walked beside him out of the shadowy room.

But it must be confessed that Tom Trenchard's father had not the happiest way in the world of securing the obedience or of sweetening the disposition of his heir.

CHAPTER III

THE OLD HOUSE OF ABBOT'S LEIGH

FEW families had served the Stuarts better in their troubles than the loyal race of whom Hugh Wyndham's father was now the representative at Trent. Years before, when Laud was still supreme in England, when Wentworth, great in design, unbearable in power, superb in failure, was brow-beating his subjects at the Irish Court, when Cromwell, an inconspicuous country gentleman, was farming, thinking, praying at St. Ives, and planning to emigrate with his cousin Hampden to the new Colonies across the seas, Sir Thomas Wyndham had called his five sons to him and had laid his injunctions on them, before he turned him to the wall and died.

“ My sons,” he said—so ran the story in the family—“ we have seen serene and quiet times; but now you must prepare for cloudy and troublesome. I command you to honour and obey our gracious Sovereign, and at all times to adhere to the Crown; and though the crown should hang on a bush, forsake it not.”

Of these five sons, no less than three had fallen already fighting for the King, and it was not for lack of fighting that one of them, Colonel Frank Wyndham, Hugh's father, still survived in prosperity and peace. In the Western campaigns he had held Dunster Castle stoutly for the King, refusing to surrender until all hope of keeping it was gone. Then, having made his peace with the Parliament, and given his parole to fight no more, he was allowed to live on

at Trent, unmolested, though every man in the country knew him to be a firm friend to the Royal cause.

Johnny Erle lost no time in returning to Colonel Wyndham's, where he had been staying before the school supper at Sherborne, and where of late in Hugh's company he had spent much of his time. Leaving Ellesdon to watch over the safety of the fugitive Captain, and the imperturbable Peters to watch over them both, Erle borrowed a horse from his cousin and made the best of his way to Trent. Hugh saw him from the window approaching, and hurrying down with a shout led him round to the stables, extracting a history of his adventures on the way.

"I never have trusted that fellow Trenchard," he commented at the end.

"Because he's a Roundhead, eh?" asked Johnny the impartial.

"No; because he's a ruffian. You are half a Roundhead, but I've never found you a ruffian--wholly--yet."

"What do you think about Morton?"

"Morton! Oh, that's quite another matter. But John, my lad, there's some mystery about him, and I want you to help me make out what it is. There is no end of confabulation going on here since he came."

"To which you are not invited?"

"No: no more will you be, my friend."

"Unless they get into some difficulty. Then they will probably come to me for help."

"You flatter yourself, Virginian."

"Well, I've no one else to flatter me, or even to be decently polite."

"Oh, there's Julia Coningsby. She's here, and she'll oblige you. John, you'd laugh at the way in which she and my mother hang upon this fellow Morton's words."

"Well, let's go and hang there too. If I'm not too dusty, I should like to see them all."

"Come on. They are holding a family council. We'll march in and offer our advice."

In a black-beamed parlour of the old manor house a small party were seated—Colonel Wyndham, a fine-looking man, still in the prime of life; his wife, a handsome gracious lady, wreathed in old lace and kindness which both became her well; and Mr. Morton, the stranger whom the two boys had met at Sherborne, now dressed in borrowed clothes of Colonel Wyndham's, and looking every inch a gentleman and Cavalier. Behind Mrs. Wyndham's high-backed chair and leaning forward, her hands clasped tightly, her dark eyes watching Morton with absorbing interest as he spoke, there stood the figure of a beautiful girl, Julia, or as her aunt would have it Juliana, Coningsby, a niece of old Lady Wyndham, the Colonel's mother, who at that moment was dozing in her room up-stairs. Mr. Morton was speaking while the others listened eagerly, and the picturesqueness of the tale lost nothing from the interest with which it was received.

"You ask me what Cromwell did himself, Miss Coningsby, at Worcester fight. Well, I can tell you, for I saw him three times in the day, and each time he was in the thick of the battle, leading, controlling, animating all. The first time was when he had just joined Fleetwood on the southwest of the city, crossing the river on their bridge of boats, and was right in the front on his charger, looking back and beckoning on the van. An hour later, when our men had broken out by Sidbury Gate and were charging the rebels on the east side of the river, there to my amazement I saw him back among them, and galloping up and down in the midst of the fire, when we thought him en-

tangled in the hedges on the other side. And later still, when everything was over, and the last charge of the Scots was crumpled up, I saw him suddenly ride off with hardly a man behind him and shout out an offer of quarter to our poor fellows in Fort Royal, who answered him only with a volley of shot. Yes, Miss Coningsby, traitor, fanatic, schemer as he is, Cromwell's a great soldier and a fearless man."

The two boys waited in the doorway, listening also, till Morton's deep voice ceased.

"But for all that, sir, if you met him with a pistol in your hand, you'd shoot him," said Hugh, advancing.

"At sight," said the other instantly, "at sight, like a dog, if I could."

There was a moment's pause. Then Morton rose with a laugh as Johnny came up. "Why, here is our friend come back to us. I trust, Mr. Erle, you left Captain Wyndham safe at Lyme?"

So Johnny had to tell his story and to take his share of credit as modestly as he could.

"Capital, John," said the Colonel. "And you've lost no time in getting back here."

"It seems that they learn in the Colonies," said Morton, "not to let the grass grow under their feet."

"It would soon be over our heads, if we didn't, sir," laughed Johnny, "for in our country things *can* grow."

"Like silver bells and cockle shells and little boys all of a row," said Miss Coningsby irrelevantly over Mrs. Wyndham's chair.

"You forget, Julia," said the kind-hearted lady within it, "that little boys have a surprising habit of springing up into brave and loyal men."

"With an astonishing resemblance, Colonel," whispered

Morton to his host aside, "to personages whom it is perilous to be like."

"Bless my soul!" said the Colonel with a start. "And all these years I've never noticed it. But it's true; there is a decided likeness, even as I remember him."

"And you've not seen him for years, have you?" added Morton mysteriously. "It's more than decided; it's amazing. Wait till you see them side by side."

Johnny was having his revenge upon Miss Coningsby, of whose interest in Ellesdon he was well aware, by refusing to take any hint which she gave him to talk more freely about his host at Lyme. Hugh, who quite understood the little comedy, stood by, chuckling with quiet delight.

"It's quite true, Julia," he interposed sympathetically, "Johnny sometimes cannot see the point."

"I wasn't aware that there was any point in Mr. Erle's conversation," retorted Miss Coningsby, turning on him.

"There isn't," said Hugh. "He's as thick as the woods of Virginia. For delicate perception you must look to me."

"It's no good, Hugh. Our minds aren't full-grown yet," sighed Johnny.

"Well, I'm sure they want nourishing," said Mrs. Wyndham, rising. "Hugh, take him and get him some supper without delay."

"And I am sure," said Julia, with a courtesy, "that Mr. Erle's appetite is full-grown at least."

"Come, Johnny," said Hugh laughing, "you must leave her in possession of the field."

But Miss Coningsby followed the boys into the supper-room, and hovered like a ministering angel round their chairs, and Johnny's tongue flowed fast in gratitude, as he told her every detail of his short stay in Lyme. Presently,

however, the two elder men came after them. The Colonel began to speak gravely, and Julia Coningsby disappeared.

"Mr. Morton has a message of importance, boys, of great importance, to send to a friend at Abbot's Leigh——"

"Mr. Norton's house?" asked Hugh.

"Yes, quite near Bristol; and Mr. Morton's business won't allow him to go there himself. He suggests that you two might like to ride there together, and to carry a letter for him."

"Of course we will," said Hugh at once.

"I needn't say that it's an honour, a very great honour for you both. For this is no ordinary business"—and there rather abruptly the Colonel stopped.

"May we know more of it, sir?" asked John.

The two men looked at each other, and Morton slightly shook his head. "I think not at present," he said. "It isn't that I don't trust you, gentlemen. On the contrary, I trust you very highly, or I should not ask you to undertake the commission. But just now I've no right to say more."

"Very good, sir; we understand."

"It may be that you'll learn more at Abbot's Leigh. But I know that you'll ask no needless questions. I want you to deliver this letter, and to take your orders from Mistress Lane, the lady to whom it is addressed."

The boys nodded.

"You will probably have to escort a small party here. It is chiefly a matter of good sense and discretion. And from what I have seen, I believe that we can count on you both for that."

"We'll do our best, sir," said Hugh simply. "When shall we start?"

"Can you be ready at dawn to-morrow?" asked the Colonel.

“No fear,” said John.

That night the boys slept the sleep of the just and the careless, and rose like giants refreshed to ride out into the fragrant dawn. The sun was already beginning to pierce the thin mists of the morning and to fling his colours over the slopes around. A bird from a tree-top piped a welcome as they turned their horses’ heads towards the gate, and the rabbits stayed for an instant to wonder, ere they broke and scuttled across the dewy lawns. The riders swung round, as they reached the corner, and glancing back at the quiet old house, saw a white hand fluttering a ribbon from a window, and dimly behind it the laughing face of a girl.

“That’s Julia,” said Hugh, nodding, and both boys waved their hats.

Below, the Colonel stood on the steps watching them, and he too waved an answer to Hugh’s deep halloo. Then the great elms of the hedge-side dropped their canopy over the picture, and singing for sheer light-heartedness the boys struck out into the shining world.

What a ride it was, how soft the turf, how cool the hill-tops, how deliciously warm the sunshine in the village where they rested at midday! Nothing would content the boys but that their luncheon should be served on the tables outside the old inn door, where they could sit and bask in the beauty of the day and gather gossip from the groups about the village green. All the talk they heard was on one subject—the great fight at Worcester, the rout of the Scotch, and the escape of the King.

“He’s not left England yet,” said one.

“They do say he’ll make for a ship at Bristol,” said another.

“It’s my belief,” said a third in a mysterious whisper, “that any moment you might turn and see him standing at your side.”

And then the audience would start at this dramatic suggestion and stare again at the striking proclamation which not half of them could read, and which a man was busy pasting on a notice-board close by the inn, which offered a thousand pounds' reward to any one who would discover and deliver the person of Charles Stuart, and denounced the penalties of high treason against all who presumed to harbour and conceal him. But not one of the speakers, John noticed, expressed a definite opinion, or committed himself to anything more decided than guarded comments and shakings of the head.

"If it were only dark, I'd have that notice down before I left," Hugh muttered.

"I'd have it down now, if we hadn't other things to think of. But we can't risk being stopped, Hugh," urged Johnny in reply.

It was some hours later in the deep-shadowed and deep-scented afternoon, when the boys' long ride at last drew to a close, and they walked their horses slowly through the little village which lies enthroned above the downs of Leigh. The house for which they were making, Abbot's Leigh, where Mr. Norton lived, was a fine old building of Elizabethan days, looking down from its many gables across a belt of noble trees to a rolling expanse of field and woodland all golden in the September sun. In front of the quaint old gate-house, surrounded by a hedge of yew, there stretched a bowling green with turf like velvet, sloping towards a shaded pool, and over the green there was scattered a small party of gentlemen and ladies, who welcomed the boys with ready hospitality as soon as they had introduced themselves.

A dignified elderly man, with a strong, grave face and a small gray beard, dressed as a clergyman—he was a Pre-

bendary of the Church of England,—came up to Erle and shook him by the hand.

“Why, Johnny,” he said, “I was with your uncle yesterday, and he was wondering when you would be home.”

“I hope you found him well, sir. If you are going back to Salisbury, please tell him that I am having a splendid time.”

“Is this gentleman also a son of Colonel Wyndham’s, Dr. Henchman?” asked a striking-looking lady at the doctor’s side. She was young and dark and handsome, with a mass of ringlets falling to her shoulders, and with big eyes which just now were full of startled wonder, as she narrowly scrutinized Johnny’s face.

“No, but he’s a great friend of Hugh Wyndham’s,” said the doctor, “and his uncle, Canon Erle of Salisbury, is a very old friend of mine.”

“And his name?”

“Is Erle, John Erle, of Lowfields in Virginia,” answered Johnny with his loftiest bow.

“It’s a good name,” said the lady graciously, “but, but”—and she stared again.

Dr. Henchman laughed. “I know what is puzzling you,” he said. “There’s a most curious likeness, if Mr. Erle will excuse my saying so, between this young gentleman and your sick friend the groom——”

The lady started a little and then laughed lightly. “Ah, you notice it too, doctor! I confess it puzzled me for a moment. But the lad, Mr. Erle, whom you happen to resemble, is something better than a groom. He is a neighbour’s son, whom I borrowed from his father to ride before me here. I’m a little anxious about him because he is just recovering from an ague, and I’m not at all sure that I ought to have brought him so far from home.”

"If Miss Lane is so careful with her servants, how kind she must be to her friends," said Dr. Henchman gallantly.

"Oh, there's no need to make a to-do about it," said the lady carelessly. "The boy will, no doubt recover; but, it always gives trouble to have servants ill. This, then, is Mr. Wyndham?" she continued, as Hugh, conducted by a couple of gentlemen, came towards them over the lawn.

Johnny stood by and chuckled as he watched Hugh's magnificent bow, and as "Mistress Jane Lane of Bentley Hall in Staffordshire, who has come to pay a welcome visit to her kinswoman, my wife"—such was Mr. Norton's elaborate introduction—swept him a noble courtesy in return.

"You are from Trent, Mr. Wyndham?" she asked. "So loyal a family needs no introduction but its name."

"I am, madam," said Hugh in his stateliest manner, "and I have the honour to bring you a letter from Mr. Morton there."

"From Mr. Morton!" said the lady quickly. She glanced at the gentleman behind Mr. Norton's back, who for his part was staring at Johnny with amazement written in his face.

"I never supposed I was so handsome," said Johnny to himself, as he stared back. "It's astonishing how much interest all these people seem to take in me."

But Miss Lane had already glanced through the letter delivered by Hugh, and she now looked up with a smile at her host. "Mr. Morton is an old friend of ours," she explained, "and I know Mr. Lascelles will like to hear what he has to say. Henry," she added, addressing the silent gentleman behind, "if you have finished playing bowls, perhaps now that it's cooler, you would take me for a stroll in the wood."

"Happy man," said Dr. Henchman, laughing, as the tall young fellow, who had been staring at Johnny, advanced.

"It is the privilege of a cousin, you see, Dr. Henchman," said the lady, as she laid a hand on Lascelles' arm, "to have to submit at any moment to be bored with some one else's affairs."

Hugh's eyes unconsciously followed her, as Lascelles led her away, and at first he hardly noticed Mr. Norton's invitation to enter the house.

"What eyes!" he said, as Johnny touched his arm.

"Yes," said John, "black like mine; and she can use them." He had not forgotten the lady's stare.

"She's beautiful," added Hugh severely.

"Yes; beautiful, and nervous too."

"Nervous? What do you mean? What about?"

"Can't tell you," said Johnny, the observant. "But I'm sure she's nervous about something or some one. And I rather think the some one is me!"—a suggestion which Hugh might be pardoned for treating with silent contempt, as they followed their host along the garden-path.

"It's not long to supper, happily," said Mr. Norton, as he showed them in. "But after your day in the saddle you must have something to wash the dust away first. Come to the buttery, and take care of your heads." He led the way along a dark passage into a low-beamed room. "Now what shall it be? Home-brewed?"

"Do you make your own cider here, sir?" asked Hugh.

"Indeed we do, and you shall see what it's like in a moment. Are you there, Pope?" he called down the passage, and a tall, grizzled butler, evidently an old soldier, responded to the call.

The boys were not sorry to quench their thirst, and their host, being summoned presently, left them ensconced in

two capacious chairs, having charged the butler to supply their wants. The buttery was an old-fashioned chamber in the oldest part of the house, with deep windows which looked on to a courtyard. On one side, adjoining the servants' quarters, a narrow closet opened out, with a door from it leading to the yard, and round this door two or three men loitered, engrossed in talk. One of them, a rough fellow with his arm in a sling, was giving an account of the great battle at Worcester where he had served on the King's side only the week before, and the others were listening to him with an intentness which left no doubt as to what their sympathies must be. The man had a dramatic way of telling his story which roused the interest of the boys, and soon they rose and strolled into the doorway and stood there listening with the rest.

“He might have been the oldest Captain of them all,” the man was saying, his face glowing with enthusiasm and a queer softness in his eyes; “I never saw more coolness in disaster or a more determined spirit in the fight. Again and again he charged with the Guards and the Highlanders right into the thick of the enemy. More than once I saw his horse go down; but he was up again and at our head in a moment. Why, when the rebels had driven us back into the city, because those cursed Scottish horse of Leslie's wouldn't stir to our relief, the King threw off his heavy armour and rode up and down the streets, calling by name on officers and men, entreating Leslie for the hundredth time to make an effort to retrieve the day. I was close to him. I heard him say as he leaned over to the General—‘I had rather that you shot me dead on the spot than kept me alive to see the consequences of this fatal day.’ But it was all no good, no good! The best we could do was to drag him away from the rout, and that was no easy job, I

warrant you. We were beat, of course; but he did all that a leader could do for his men. He's a born soldier, God bless him, whatever they say!" And tears gathered in the fellow's eyes.

"God bless him!" echoed the rest.

"And preserve him from his enemies," said Hugh.

A serving-man in a rough gray suit had strolled across the court as the soldier's story was telling, and had joined the little group about the door. He was near his own age, Johnny noticed, a year or two older perhaps, and fully as swarthy as himself, with black hair cut close and short, and with hands as brown as a walnut. On his face, which was a trifle thin and weary, and pitted with smallpox marks, he wore an easy smile; and as he stood there leaning against a buttress, his dark head carried high, his whole figure expressing a certain indolent grace, he reminded Johnny of a handsome slave-lad who had served him in his boyhood far away.

"You saw the King then?" the newcomer asked quietly, as the soldier ended his tale.

"Saw him! I should think so! Why, I spent half the day at his elbow. I served in his own Regiment of Guards."

"Did you? In whose Company?"

"Major Broughton's," said the soldier sharply. He did not care to be cross-questioned by a serving-man.

"Ah, you were in luck," said the other genially. "Tell us, what kind of man is the King to look at now?"

"To look at? Oh, a fine-looking young fellow, and he sits his horse like a rock. He's dark too, as black as you are, but taller by three fingers at least."

The lad in gray stepped back into the shadow, and his figure seemed to contract. But the soldier's laugh pur-

sued him. "You've never been soldiering, my lad, I suppose?"

"Oh, we can't all be heroes." There was a note of laughing mockery in his tone which the older man was quick to resent.

"Mother can't spare you, eh?"

"My mother has had—troubles," said the lad slowly, with an odd touch of pathos in his voice.

"I dare say; and you're one of them, to judge you by your looks."

The repartee convulsed the little audience. Even Hugh and Johnny in the background smiled. But the lad in gray seemed in no whit disconcerted.

"It's possible," he said, with a laugh too.

"I'll wager you could handle a pike if you tried to," said the soldier, his generosity restored by his success. "Why don't you come out now and fight for the King?"

The lad emerged from the shadow, and his figure seemed to gain in height as he stepped up to the soldier and laid a friendly hand upon his arm. "I shall be there," he said, "when the King calls for followers. I wish, my friend, that he had more like you."

The soldier turned slightly. The tone of superiority galled him, but something in the lad's quiet dignity stopped the protest on his lips. As he moved, he caught sight for the first time of Johnny standing in the background, and drew back surprised.

"Why, there's a pair of you," he cried, "begging your pardon, sir,"—as he realized Johnny's superior rank.

Every one inevitably looked at Erle. The resemblance between the two young men in size, in coloring, even in feature, was curiously close, though the lad in gray was older, and a keen observer would have noticed the touch of

mockery in his expression and the faint lines about his mouth and eyes.

Hugh burst out laughing and the rest of the company indulged in a respectful grin. "Why, Johnny," murmured Hugh, "I never thought you'd live to find your double, least of all in a Somersetshire serving-man."

But the lad in gray caught the aside. "I come from Staffordshire, sir," he said quickly, "from Bentley, with Mistress Lane."

"In that case, you have a quartan ague and ought not to be loafing about here," said Johnny with a laugh, remembering Miss Lane's remarks. But as he spoke, he was interrupted by a cry. Across the courtyard, followed by Lascelles, there came with a quick step the lady herself, her fine eyes blazing, her fine skirts brushing the stones.

"But nervous, Hugh," whispered Johnny under his breath.

"William Jackson, William Jackson," she called in a clear imperious tone; and the lad in gray swept off his hat. Hugh advanced to meet her, but the serving-man stepped coolly in between.

"You have no business here, Jackson," she began to rate him. But her eyes, John fancied, softened as she spoke. "It is most imprudent to risk a return of your illness by loitering about out of doors like this." Her looks moved round the courtyard while she talked.

"It was such a fine evening, that I was tempted, madam," the lad urged.

"Tempted, yes; but you should resist," she answered.

"I never could resist temptation," said the serving-man, boldly; but his voice was low.

The lady dropped her eyes and raised her voice. "Mr. Pope, Mr. Pope," she called; and the old butler emerged in an instant from the house.

“Take this lad up-stairs,” she commanded. “He has no business here. And see that he has food and all he needs. I don’t want him ill upon my hands again. Go, William;” and she stood in the courtyard, watching, till with a bow and a smile the lad had followed the butler out of sight.

Miss Lane advanced to the buttery door, and the idlers there made way. “There are some things in which young men require perpetual watching,” she said to Hugh, as she passed in.

“There are some things,” he answered, like a courtier, looking straight into her face, “which young men could watch perpetually, were they allowed.”

The lady smiled slightly, and Johnny broadly behind.

“Mr. Wyndham, where did you learn the manners of Whitehall?” Then she added, quickly, “Did you talk with my groom, Mr. Erle?”

“Well, I was occupied in looking at him,” said Johnny.

Miss Lane started slightly; then laughed. “There’s no denying, Mr. Erle, that he’s like you, in some ways ridiculously like. And Jackson is a good lad and well-mannered, and speaks with an ease—with a freedom—beyond his station at times. But one can see at once the difference. The lad is obviously of humble birth.”

For his part, Johnny didn’t see it so clearly. But he took the compliment for what it was worth.

They were a gay enough party at supper, Miss Lane of course leading the talk, and being gallantly supported by young Lascelles and old Dr. Henchman, and not ungallantly by Hugh. Now and again the conversation would return to the great topic of the day, the effects of the battle of Worcester, the escape and the flight of the King.

“They are keeping a sharp lookout at Bristol,” Mr.

Norton observed. "The rebels expect His Majesty to make for Bristol Harbour, to take ship there, if he can."

"I wish he'd take one of our ships to Virginia," said Johnny. "Berkeley would give him a grand welcome there."

"Oh, I hope he's safe on the seas by this time," Miss Lane interposed. "If, as they say, he went North after the battle, he may have found a ship in Lancashire or on the coast of Wales."

Here Pope, the butler, came and whispered in her ear.

"Oh, by all means," she answered, aloud, and she filled a small dish as she spoke. "Take him that, Pope, and tell him he shall have some meat sent up, when we have done."

"Is it the groom again?" Dr. Henchman asked.

"Yes, the groom again," laughed the lady. "If I can't get him well, my father will never forgive me, and I shall not get to my friends in Dorsetshire at all."

"The longer you can stay with us, the better pleased we shall be, Jane," said Mrs. Norton, a delicate lady sitting at the table's head.

Jane bowed her acknowledgments, smiling, and the stream of talk flowed on. Johnny marked how bravely Miss Lane sustained it, how gay was her voice, how determined she seemed to make all the company glad. Hugh was entranced, the rest delighted. So was Johnny himself, for that matter, though he couldn't help murmuring the while:

"Yet she's nervous, I'm sure that she's nervous." Even in those days American boys were preternaturally acute.

Miss Lane had all manner of questions to ask Hugh about his home and his people, about their journey from Trent and the places they had passed through, about her friend Mr. Morton and the boys' meeting with him in Sher-

borne Park. Hugh of course was only too ready to respond. From Hugh she turned her attentions to Johnny, and would not rest till she had elicited from him the whole story of his visit to Lyme Regis, and a full description of that little port and its shipping, and of William Ellesdon and his connection with the sea. Sometimes she would laugh at her own questions and would seem to wave his replies aside. And yet, as often as he met her eyes, Johnny wondered whether, for all her rattle, there was not some clear purpose in her talk.

The party broke up soon after supper, and when Miss Lane had left them, the two boys were not sorry to go to bed. They occupied a room together, and Hugh was soon asleep. But for some reason or other Johnny lay restless and wakeful, watching the moonlight dancing on the walls. At last he could stand it no longer, and rising, he began to search for a light by which to read. But, search as he might, there was no tinder-box in the room. Presently he remembered that he had seen one on a shelf in the buttery below.

"I wonder if I could find my way there," he murmured, and drawing on his clothes he resolved to try.

The moonlight helped him as he groped along the corridor and down the stairs, across the hall and through the circuitous passages where Mr. Norton had led them that afternoon. He reached the buttery, pluming himself upon his cleverness, and was feeling on the shelf for the tinder-box he sought, when, as ill-luck would have it, his sleeve caught in a hook, and as he pulled it away sharply, he knocked over a plate which fell clattering to the floor. Almost immediately, as Johnny stood dumbly regarding it, the moonlight shining full upon his face, he heard a voice and a footstep behind him. A door opened; a candle flick-

ered through ; and the deep voice of Pope, the butler, called out of the dark :

“ What’s that ? Who’s moving there ? ”

As he entered, Johnny faced him. The man started, and the light shook in his hand.

“ You, sir ! Do you want me ? Is there anything wrong, my liege ? ”

“ Your what ? ” said Johnny, with a stare.

The butler raised his candle till it flared in Johnny’s eyes. “ Oh, it’s you, Mr. Erle,” he said, quietly. But he looked like a man who had had a shock.

“ Yes, it’s I,” said John ; “ I’m looking for a tinder-box, because I can’t sleep, and I want a light to read by. There’s none in my room, so I groped my way down here.”

“ Oh, yes, sir,” said the man.

“ Whom did you take me for, Pope ? ”

“ Really, I don’t know, sir.”

“ A tramp, was it, or the devil ? ”

“ Oh, not a tramp, sir,” said the man with a grave smile.

“ The other gentleman then ? In that case I’ve discovered your secret.” Pope started again. “ It’s a risky thing to owe the devil allegiance ; but it’s still riskier to call him ‘ my liege.’ ”

“ I must have been dreaming, sir,” said the butler feebly.

“ No doubt,” said John, laughing. “ I’m sorry I startled you. Good-night.” But as he made his way up-stairs, tinder-box in hand, his brain was busy with a queer dream of his own.

“ Suppose, suppose it were so,” he said to himself ; “ it would account for many things ; ” and he stopped at the end of a corridor and thought.

So absorbed was he in his new idea that he never noticed that he had taken a wrong turning and had lost his way—

so absorbed that he did not notice that a door had opened at the other end of the passage and that a light was streaming out. Suddenly he wheeled round, hearing voices behind him, and a strange sight met his eyes.

Conspicuous against the encompassing shadows—for the windows here were curtained and the moonlight could not creep through—Mr. Lascelles was standing, candle in hand, in the doorway of a lighted room, and beyond him, inside the doorway, Miss Lane—the proud Miss Lane—was stooping to the ground, as she kissed with devotion the hand of her dark-faced groom.

With a cry Johnny stepped towards them. With a cry Lascelles whipped out a sword. But Miss Lane was on her feet in a moment, and the door was closed and she outside it when she spoke.

“Guard the door,” she said to Lascelles quickly; and advancing she boldly laid her hand on Johnny’s arm.

“It’s Mr. Erle, isn’t it?” she asked, and though her voice trembled a little, her manner was undismayed. “I thought so. Come in here, Mr. Erle, and talk things over. Henry, you will keep watch outside.”

So saying, she pushed open another door close at hand, and Johnny obediently followed her into a lighted room.

CHAPTER IV

REVELATIONS

IT was a lady's boudoir into which Miss Lane led the way, lit with a couple of candles, and littered with all those miscellaneous little adjuncts, with which, even in travelling, ladies are often unwilling to dispense. She sat down by a table, and pointed John Erle to a chair.

"Now, Mr. Erle," she said, "please tell me what you were doing in that passage, and exactly what you saw."

"So far as I can tell," said Johnny, "I was losing my way;" and he gave Miss Lane the whole story of his explorations in the darkness.

She smiled. "Oh, you ran into Pope, did you? And what did he say?"

Johnny paused and faced his companion. "Pope was so overcome," he answered, "that he positively took me for a King."

Miss Lane turned her dark eyes full on him. "Mr. Erle, don't fence with me. Tell me what you saw just now."

"I saw Miss Lane bidding a most gracious farewell to her groom."

"What do you know?"

"Nothing."

"What do you suspect then—frankly?" As she spoke, she moved her hand impatiently, and it caught in a light chain which she wore round her neck. From the chain a small ivory was suspended which swung loose for a moment in the air, and in that moment Johnny caught it and recog-

nized the picture which it bore. He rose to his feet and handed it back to the owner with a bow.

“Frankly, I suspect,” he answered, “that that miniature, which strangely resembles two persons in this house to-night, is the portrait of your King—and mine.”

Miss Lane rose too. “You are loyal?” she said, and her breath came quickly.

“I have always been thought so,” said Johnny proudly.

“There are Erles in Staffordshire who are rebels.”

“And there are Erles in Dorset who are not.”

Something in the boy’s air of proud assurance charmed her. Her anxious look vanished, a smile broke over her face; and she stretched out a hand towards him, which he carried at once to his lips.

“You are like him,” she said, “strangely like him. Mr. Erle, the King’s secret is safe with you?”

“Till death,” said Johnny simply. But his eyes shone and his face was aglow.

“I’ll tell you the whole story.”

“I don’t ask it.”

“No. But now you’ve guessed, it is better you should know. Sit down again. Stop, I must speak to Henry.” And as she opened the door, Lascelles stepped to her side.

“Henry,” she said, “Mr. Erle knows. But our secret is safe with him; I answer for him. Don’t wait there any longer. Go back to the King, and tell him he has another devoted subject. I have something more to say to Mr. Erle.”

“Shall I leave him with you? It is late.”

She blushed suddenly and threw back her head. “I shall not keep him,” she whispered. “He’s only a boy—a chivalrous boy. In this matter, Henry, you and I have

forgotten what conventions mean. Good-night and trust me."

"Implicitly," the young man answered, "and with all I have in the world."

Miss Lane reentered the room and sat down by Johnny's side. "Now for the story, Mr. Erle," she said. "Two days after the defeat at Worcester, Lord Wilmot, the King's companion—you know him, don't you?"

"Not I," said John.

"Oh, yes, you do; you met him at Sherborne, and you brought me a letter from him to-day."

"Then he calls himself Morton at present," said Johnny, determined to be surprised at nothing now.

Miss Lane nodded. "At present he does. Well—two days after the battle, Lord Wilmot sent word to my brother at Bentley that he was in hiding near, and as I had a pass to Bristol for myself and a serving-man, I offered to take him with me there. But no sooner had Lord Wilmot come to Bentley than we heard that the King himself was close at hand, and we at once determined to beg His Majesty to take Lord Wilmot's place. I can't tell you all his wonderful adventures—the King will delight to tell you them himself—his flight to White Ladies the night after the battle, his hiding in the woods of Boscobel, his vain attempt to cross the Severn, his midnight wanderings with the faithful yeomen who guarded him all through. Mr. Erle, it's a wonderful story, and one of the most astonishing in the records of romance!"

She clasped her hands, and her eyes shone dimly. "God preserved him! Surely God preserved him! He will not let him fall into the hands of his enemies now."

She paused. "Go on," said Johnny, listening with deep sympathy. "Please tell me all you can."

"I could talk of it for hours," she answered, smiling, pleased with the enthusiasm in his face. "I shall never forget the night when Lord Wilmot and my brother brought him at last to Bentley Hall. I was waiting for them after midnight—the others were all abed, and Colonel Lane had gone over to Moseley to bring them back—when I heard them coming through the orchard and went out to meet them at the door. My brother was off his horse first. "This is our master, Jane," he said simply, "and the master of us all;" and as I knelt, a strange figure dismounted and gave me his hand. I could have cried, Mr. Erle; the sight was so pitiful, so cruel for a great King. His Majesty had his hair cut short, as you've seen it, and covered with a greasy old steeple-crowned hat. His coat and breeches were threadbare, made anyhow, patched and worn; his doublet was dirty leather; his shoes all slashed and full of holes. I never saw a more disreputable figure, a more horribly complete disguise. He was tired too, worn-out and anxious, but yet so gracious. And when we had brought him in and refreshed him, his cheerfulness came back again, and he laughed over his troubles and apologized so merrily for his looks and for his dress."

She stopped and smiled rather pathetically.

"Then you brought him South, as you had arranged?" Johnny asked.

"Yes, when he was rested, we fitted him out as a groom, and he rode before me here. Lord Wilmot went on ahead to warn our friends in the West Country and to prepare for the King's coming to Trent. Where he met Captain Wyndham, I don't know—he doesn't tell me. But that, and all the rest, you must find out for yourself."

"I shall want to hear everything," said John.

"So you shall. But, Mr. Erle, it is late now. And

to-morrow we've a good deal to do—plans to make, and above all, secrets to keep. Remember, you and I and my cousin, Henry Lascelles, are the only people in this house who know the truth."

"And Pope?" said John.

"Yes, I forgot Pope. He knew the King by sight, and guessed; so we had to tell him; and his help has been invaluable since. The Nortons of course are absolutely to be trusted, and I think Dr. Henchman suspects. But we think it safer that as few people as possible should be told."

"May I tell Hugh Wyndham?" asked John.

"Not without the King's permission; not at present, at any rate. And of course, Mr. Erle, our talk to-night is a secret too."

She blushed slightly and rose again. "Good-night," she said softly, and she held out her hand to the boy.

He rose and took it. "Miss Lane," he said gravely, "tell me that you don't regret the accident which has made me your—your ——"

"Confidant? No, I don't. I trust my accomplice. And, Mr. Erle, perhaps I am fanciful and superstitious; but I can't help thinking that your face and your figure were given you that you might be of service to the King."

It is a moot point whether Johnny viewed the purposes of Providence quite in the same light. But he stooped and kissed the hand of a brave and beautiful young lady in the most approved fashion of loyal Cavaliers. By her directions he regained his bedroom, and while settling himself down for a wakeful night to think over his exciting adventures, incontinently and promptly fell asleep.

Hugh could not understand why his sworn companion was so hard to get hold of next day. Whenever he wanted him, Johnny seemed to be missing; and to make matters

worse, a search or an enquiry generally elicited the fact that he had been colloquing with Miss Lane. Of course, to Hugh it was a matter of supreme indifference where his friend Erle spent his time or with whom he chose to talk. But nevertheless a shade of stiffness crept into Wyndham's manner, while Johnny for his part went about with head uplifted, for was he not sharing the innermost counsels of a beauty and a King?

All that day William Jackson remained in his room in retirement, and Pope exhibited an extraordinary interest in the welfare of the ague-stricken groom. All that day Johnny was the object of looks and nods and whispered consultations, but he was not admitted to the presence of the King. It was decided that, as Lord Wilmot had suggested, the little party should go on next day to Trent. But in the morning Mrs. Norton was taken ill. It seemed difficult for Miss Lane without a strong excuse, to leave her; and a scheme had to be concocted which would furnish her with a pretext for hurrying away.

Accordingly, while they sat at supper in the evening, Pope entered, with a letter which he handed to Miss Lane, and which that lady received with a start of surprise.

"How strange!" she cried. "A letter from my mother, sent post from Bentley! What can she have to say?"

"I hope there is no bad news, cousin," said Mr. Norton pleasantly, as Miss Lane opened and glanced through the note.

But the lady's beautiful eyes had filled with tears. "My dear Mr. Norton," she said, rising hastily—and as she rose she caught John's eyes across the table and seemed to choke with tears. "It is bad news, most serious bad news, I fear. I must return at once to Bentley. My father is reported to be very ill."

The company rose too in great concern. Mr. Lascelles at once bent forward with enquiries. Mr. Norton overflowed with sympathy, and Hugh's face grew almost anxious as he watched the young lady's distress.

"Indeed, indeed, I don't like leaving you, Mr. Norton, above all when dear Mrs. Norton is so ill. But what can I do? There's nothing for it. I must forego my visit into Dorsetshire, and get home as quickly as I can. My dear father, my dear father!" And pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, and with a touching glance at Mr. Norton, the lady left the room.

"Poor girl! It is most sudden and most unfortunate," said their host kindly.

"Indeed it is," said Lascelles, "and it will be a great disappointment to Jane. But it will be best to take her home at once. You won't mind, Mr. Norton, if we start the first thing in the morning?"

And so it was arranged. Miss Lane's distress restored Hugh's interest in the lady, which had begun to flag a little since she had shown so marked a preference for the company of his friend.

"I hate to see a woman cry," he told the offending friend in confidence, as they strolled out on to the bowling-green.

"It all depends, I think, on why she does it," answered the unfeeling Johnny, who had his own reasons for distrusting the emotion he had seen.

Hugh stared at the unsympathetic answer. Johnny's ways were getting beyond him, and he vouchsafed no reply.

Early next morning a little party rode out from the old Tudor gateway and started to descend the sunlit downs, Lascelles leading, with Miss Lane close behind him, mounted pillion on the horse which William Jackson rode, and Hugh and Johnny bringing up the rear. Mr. Norton

went out on to the steps to see them off; and behind him, with tears in his eyes, stood the butler, fidgeting to and fro in nervous agitation which he vainly struggled to conceal.

“Old Pope,” said Hugh to Johnny, “seems to have caught the ague from the groom. He’s shaking his bones about in the most extraordinary way.”

“He’s never got over the fright I gave him the other night,” said Johnny absently,—his eyes were fixed on Miss Lane’s swarthy attendant. “He found me, you remember, groping in the pantry and took me for the devil in the dark.”

They rode for a while towards Bristol, until they reached a point where the way to the South turned off. There Hugh Wyndham had proposed that he and John should leave the others, who, he imagined, would go on through Bristol to take the Northern road. But at the crossroads Lascelles, with a glance at Miss Lane, who nodded, increased his pace, and to Hugh’s surprise swept round towards the South.

“Hullo, Mr. Lascelles, you’re wrong,” he shouted: “that’s the way to Bedminster; you turn off here.” And he trotted up to Miss Lane’s side.

The lady was talking brightly to her groom, but she looked round at Hugh and smiled. “I think Henry knows what he’s about, Mr. Wyndham.” So Hugh, shrugging his shoulders, dropped to the rear again.

Leaving the Bristol road behind them, the party rode on further and further to the South.

“Where on earth is the fellow taking her?” Hugh grunted presently. “They can’t get back to Staffordshire round here. At this rate we shall have them all at Trent.”

“Would you mind that, Hugh?” asked Johnny drily.

“Mind? No. But if Miss Lane is anxious to get back

to her father, it's a stupid thing to take her out of the way like this."

"Miss Lane's a remarkable woman," said Johnny, smiling broadly. "I never saw anxiety more bravely borne."

As he spoke, the lady's laugh rang out ahead so gaily, and was answered by such a gay laugh from the groom, that Hugh started forward with an angry look.

"That groom is cursedly familiar," he muttered, and he spurred his horse to the front again.

"Take care, Hugh," called Johnny sternly after him, and he too quickened his pace and joined the rest.

Lascelles had halted a moment at another crossroad, where again a track ran North and South. They had now left Bedminster and the Severn stream behind them, had passed Bishopsworth and were ascending towards Dundry Hill. And here Miss Lane too halted and her eyes sought Johnny's in enquiry, as if asking what he recommended her to do. Hugh had now laid a hand on Jackson's bridle and was stopping the cavalcade again.

"I assure you, Miss Lane," he said, "you are going all in the wrong direction. This fellow knows nothing of the way."

The groom opened his lips to speak and his dark skin flushed slightly. But at a touch from Miss Lane he held his peace and smiled.

"What the deuce are you laughing at, fellow?" Hugh began in sharp annoyance. But as he spoke, Johnny firmly edged his horse between, while Miss Lane answered with a note of entreaty in her voice which even Hugh's wrath could not withstand.

"Mr. Wyndham," she said, "I know you have reason to be surprised. But I ask you to trust me a little. I am not needed at home. That was all a mistake; indeed, I fear, an

invention. Don't blame me too harshly, for I don't like doing these things, and I will explain it all one day. Meanwhile I am coming to Trent, and I ask you, as the representative of your father, to make me welcome and to lead us there."

She stretched out her hand to the lad as she spoke, and Johnny made way for Hugh to take it, to begin to question her, and then to stop, and bend, and kiss it, with a bow which did honour to his breeding.

"Thank you," she said, "for telling me that I'm not asking too much."

Hugh's murmur was sufficient answer, even without the crimson signal in his face. With no more ado he rode forward, and putting himself at Lascelles' side, led the way along the track towards the South. The dark groom smiled back significantly at his mistress. "With such diplomacy," he whispered, "who can doubt that we are safe?"

"All the same, sir, I pray you to be careful," she answered in tones whose vibrations proclaimed them as sincere.

On they rode, through the mellow autumn morning, over the mists and down into the hollows where the sunshine hid—through Chew Stoke, where a group of wide-eyed villagers stared, ruminated, and forgot them, as they galloped by; through West Harptree, with its famous gorge and ruined keep, and its seven old yew trees guarding the churchyard and the lonely spire above; through Binegar, perched upon the summit of the Mendips, where they paused in the shadow of an ancient battlemented tower, to survey the white road which wound like a river before them towards Shepton Mallet and the shining lands beyond. At Binegar a halt was called and they dismounted. The horse

which Miss Lane rode had cast a shoe, and William Jackson had to take it to the smith's, while the rest of the party waited a few doors off in the porch of the quiet little inn. Presently Hugh, who wanted something on his own account at the smithy, strolled there too, and found the groom holding the horse's hoof, and talking to the blacksmith at his work.

"News?" the smith was saying, apparently in answer to some enquiry upon Jackson's part. "No, there's no news that I know of, nothing but the beating of those rogues of Scots."

"Oh, that's stale news by this time," laughed the groom. "But there were some Englishmen at Worcester among them. Are any of them taken yet?"

"Oh, plenty, not a doubt of it," answered the smith slowly. "Wo-ho, my beauty, stand steady. But the worst rogue of the lot—Charles Stuart—I've not heard that he is caught."

"Oh, he deserves hanging as much as any of them," responded Jackson; "were it only for bringing in the rascal Scots."

Hugh scowled at this. But the blacksmith seemed to like it; he looked up and laughed. "True for you," he answered; "and that's spoken like an honest man."

"Now, my man, get on. We don't come here to air your politics," Hugh broke in sharply. His temper was rising, not so much at the views of the blacksmith, which he expected, as at the easy freedom with which they were accepted by Miss Lane's groom.

But Jackson only looked at him and laughed the more. "Faith, I'm with you there, blacksmith. No one thinks worse of Charles Stuart than I do myself."

Hugh gasped, but something in the man's laugh arrested



"How dare you make such jokes in my presence?"

him. The groom was gazing at him fixedly. The smith had bent down over his work.

"This horse has been ridden pretty freely," he suggested. "But he's been carelessly shod."

"Then take care that you shoe him better," said Jackson. "Who knows but that we may get on the trail of Charles Stuart, if you do your work well? And then, if I catch him, blacksmith, I promise you I'll share the reward."

Hugh's patience was exhausted, and he turned hotly on the groom. "How dare you make such jokes in my presence?" he asked, with riding-whip uplifted and with blazing eyes.

The blacksmith chuckled. He liked a groom who stood up to his master. Stiff Puritan and democrat, he enjoyed the baiting of an angry Cavalier.

"Fight it out," he muttered, "and here, you hold the horse a moment." A tool was missing, and he stepped back in search of it into the workshop which adjoined the forge.

But William Jackson faced Hugh's lifted whip undaunted. His easy smile broadened a little. His dark eyes gazed back into Hugh's angry ones, amused but not dismayed. Then he laid a hand coolly on Hugh's shoulder, and answered him with a curious note of dignity in his voice.

"My friend, no man has a better right to crack such jokes than I."

Hugh gasped. Then in a moment the scales fell from his eyes and he understood. His hand dropped; his face paled; his lips quivered; his fierce gaze grew gentle and dim. With a low cry he flung his hat on the ground, and himself on his knees beside it, and forgetful of everything else, was pressing the groom's stained hand to his lips. The dark face smiled curiously on him for an instant, and then the stained hand drew itself away.

"Take care, my friend. For my sake control yourself."

As he spoke, the blacksmith reentered, and Jackson's laugh rang out afresh. "This gentleman has lost his hat now, blacksmith. But that's better than losing our tempers, eh?"

"I'd sooner see him lose his temper," said the blacksmith provocatively, hoping, no doubt, to make Hugh blaze out again.

But in that he was disappointed. Hugh's head was in a whirl, a whirl of joy, of wonder and of self-reproach, all lost at pride in the King's frank confession, and at the chance offered him of deserving so superb a trust. He left the smithy in silence, and presently they got to horse again and started, Hugh moving like one in a dream. But something in his eyes told John his secret, and in a silent handshake the two friends confided to each other the explanations that no words were needed to convey. There was no more friction for the rest of the journey, no more angry comment on the freedoms of the groom; only an anxious solicitude to obey his slightest wish or gesture, which betrayed to Miss Lane, who noted it, how much Wyndham guessed or knew. In the long ride across Somersetshire nothing happened to imperil the little party's safety or to affect their course. Outside Castle Cary, where they stayed and rested, they were met by Mr. Morton, otherwise Lord Wilmot, who took them to the house of Mr. Kirton, Lord Hertford's steward there. Wilmot, whose dress was fastidious, laughed gaily at the King's attire.

"Upon my soul," said Charles, "it is little short of treason, Wilmot, that you should ride about bedizened so, while you display your lawful Sovereign to the derision of the countryside. You don't know to what mistakes you may expose me," and he glanced laughingly at Hugh, who

flushed. "But though you won't sacrifice your looks," he went on gravely, "I think all of you would sacrifice your lives."

The short distance from Castle Cary was easily accomplished. Colonel Wyndham came out some way to meet them, and the King, recognizing his old friend in a moment, called out brightly, "Frank, Frank, how are you? Here's a large and dangerous party come to visit you. Are you sure that you can take them in?"

"Sure and certain, Sir," the Colonel answered, "that my house and my sword and my children and all that I have are yours."

As they passed through a village near Trent, they found a party in the churchyard, composed of troopers of the Commonwealth and of gaping rustics from the street, all gathered round a big fellow, a soldier, who was loudly protesting that he with his own hand had slain the King.

"See here," cried the braggart to his wondering audience, as he waved a helmet and a bit of a buff-coat overhead; "there's the coat that I took from his body, and there's the helmet I took from his head!"

A shout went up from his hearers, a shout oddly compounded of triumph, surprise, excitement and respect. "Long live the Commonwealth!" cried a strong voice, taken up by many drunken echoes. Colonel Wyndham laid a hand on the King's bridle; but Charles only smiled bitterly in reply.

"Ring the bells," piped a shrill voice from a corner, and the cry was caught up by the crowd. A dozen fellows ran across the churchyard, made their way into the belfry and began to ring a peal of joy.

Charles glanced at Colonel Wyndham. "Is this the way, Frank, that you welcome Kings?"

"My liege, my liege," the Colonel's voice broke with

indignation. "If you weren't with us, by heaven we'd thrash the rascals from the ground;" and his fingers tightened on the riding-whip he held.

"As it is, that liar shall smart for his bragging," said Johnny between his teeth. "Come, Hugh!" and the two boys reined up for a moment, while the rest of the party rode on. Then Johnny turned to the crowd and edged his horse forward, with Hugh at his side.

"Hullo, there, hero," he shouted loudly. The crowd parted and Johnny, riding up to the big man, caught hold of the buff-coat and examined it with a prodigious show of interest and of awe.

"'Tis his," he cried in ringing tones, "'tis his own coat, Charles Stuart's sleeve and arm-pit! Beyond question the King, the Pretender, must be dead! And you, sir"—he seized the trooper's hand with his own and held it—"you must be both a hero and a rich man now!"

"A rich man, no," said the other, puzzled. The heroism he did not disclaim.

"A rich man, yes, I say, with a thousand pounds in your pocket. Look at the notices! It's promised to the man who killed the King! Friends," shouted Johnny, as he turned to the crowd, whispering aside to Hugh, "seize his other hand, and do as I do. Friends, this brave fellow has gained immortal glory and a thousand pounds. You're willing to drink his health with it, I warrant! A largesse, a largesse! Let all friends of the Commonwealth share!"

The familiar cry was taken up in a moment with a laugh and a shout by the crowd, even the man's own comrades joining in the cry, while Hugh and John got hold of the trooper's hands and wrung them up and down, repeating loudly, "Drink your health, sir, drink your health, sir, largesse, largesse!" all the while.

The man backed, grew red, resisted, struggled, protested he had nothing to give away. But the boys' cry and their relentless laughter found ready echoes in the audience around.

"For shame, for shame! Don't grudge us a drink! Lads, the man's got a thousand pounds in his pocket, and he won't spare a penny for his friends!"

"Shame! shame! A largesse! A largesse!" resounded upon every side.

The big fellow, now furious and helpless, the crowd closing in on him, the boys working like pump-handles at his arms, protested again and shouted, lost his temper, and roared curses at the mob. The mob on its side too grew angry, and suddenly the boys let go of the trooper's hands.

"He's running! Stop him! Stop him!" called a voice, and a rush was made after the man.

"After him, lads, or he'll cheat you!" yelled Johnny. "To the horse-pond with the thousand pounds!"

Relentlessly the mob took up the cry. Some of the troopers tried to interpose to save their comrade, but the villagers closed round him and kept them at bay. The man was dragged from his horse and surrounded. The crowd was angry, the horse-pond was temptingly near. With a quiet smile, Hugh and Johnny drew out of the tumult, and galloping after their party, rejoined them as they passed through Colonel Wyndham's gates.

"Well?" asked the King.

"We left that bragging rascal in the horse-pond, sir," said Johnny, grinning happily.

But it was to the sound of church bells, ringing his own requiem in the distance, that King Charles II entered Trent.

CHAPTER V

IN SALISBURY CLOSE

“THAT is the kind of thing which I shouldn’t mind transplanting to Virginia,” said John Erle with unwonted humility, as he walked at his cousin’s side up Salisbury Close.

He had been sent post-haste two days before from Trent to Lyme, bearing letters and messages from Colonel Wyndham, to which Ellesdon had now come to Salisbury to reply. And Ellesdon had responded all the more readily when Johnny produced a note from Juliana Coningsby as well, telling him that she proposed to visit Salisbury with the Colonel, and earnestly bespeaking his assistance for the Colonel’s friends. Salisbury had been fixed on for the place of meeting, partly because one or two of its houses were favourite resorts of the depressed Cavaliers, but chiefly to divert suspicion from the southern parts of Dorsetshire and the neighbourhood of Lyme, where a few of Charles’ friends were planning his escape. So John and his cousin had ridden full tilt across the county to the famous cathedral city in the Wiltshire downs, and having left their horses at the King’s Arms near, were making their way through the September sunshine, in search of Canon Erle, across the Close.

There are perhaps few corners of the cities of men more visibly stamped with beauty and with peace. The two cousins, who had seen it often, stood gazing as travellers

gaze on unfamiliar scenes, struck afresh, after the dust and heat of their journey, by its ancient stateliness, its inviolable calm. Before them the lawns lay cool and fragrant under the mighty shadows of the church. Beside them were the fronts and gables of the fine old houses of the Close, with their rich red roofs, their quaint irregular windows, their thick-set trees turning to gold already behind the mellow garden walls. Above them, where the birds wheeled and the breezes wandered around the loveliest of English spires, the great gray building rose majestic, superbly grave, aerially light, watching with lofty and abiding patience over the city unfolded at its feet, over the river that washed it and the wide hills that fenced it round, over the vain pursuits, the vainer passions, the wasted hours and energies of men.

“ For that kind of thing, my boy,” said Ellesdon, after a silence, “ time is the only planter, and the only movement possible decay.”

As they passed the great door at the west end, a man stepped out into the sunshine beside them. He was a curious figure, very tall and angular, with a thin long face, a slight stoop in the shoulders, and small keen searching eyes. His hair and moustache were black, his features sallow, and his thick black eyebrows took a curious upward twist, which gave a rather sinister expression to the brow. His dress was dark and severely simple, except for a bit of fine lace at the throat and sleeves, his walk and carriage were easy and deliberate, and his air was the air of a gentleman who viewed the world with a touch of disdain. Moreover, Salisbury Close was clearly not the world he was accustomed to move in, for he looked round on any of its inhabitants who passed him with a sharp amused scrutiny tinged with contempt.

But it was some emotion stronger than amusement which made him start back with an exclamation of surprise as his glance fell upon the two young men. As Johnny looked up for a moment and faced him, the stranger stepped forward again, his eyes searching the lad's face and figure with an incredulous, wondering stare. Then, as if almost involuntarily, he swept off his hat with an elaborate bow, and in a low voice stammered, "Sir! Is it possible? I don't mistake?"—and stopped.

"My name's John Erle, sir," Johnny answered sharply. In the last few days he had become accustomed to the consternation which his appearance sometimes caused, and guessed at once the reason, which he dared not disclose. "I haven't the pleasure, I think, of knowing you."

The stranger drew himself up in an instant and replaced his hat. But his eyes continued to examine the other from head to foot. "I beg pardon," he said; "I was mistaken, evidently mistaken." But he stood there rooted to the pavement and gazing after the cousins with the same deliberate stare, till they had turned the corner and were lost to sight.

"That gentleman seemed to like your appearance, Johnny," said Ellesdon with a laugh, as they passed on. "It's more than I can say for his. I never saw a better model for Mephistopheles."

John laughed too. He was strictly pledged to secrecy and was not allowed to whisper even to a Royalist like Ellesdon anything about the movements of the King. "I haven't even a bowing acquaintance," he said, "with Mephistopheles, at least not yet. But the truth is—you know me too well to notice it—I have grown wonderfully impressive to look at in the last few days."

At the far end of the Close they found their uncle,

a spare figure with a thoughtful face and a quiet smile, pacing up and down with his old friend, Dr. Henchman, whom Johnny had last seen at Abbot's Leigh, and who was a noted Prebendary, scholar, and divine. The two clergymen were deep in a discussion, so deep that they did not notice the younger men approach, the Canon holding a little vellum-covered volume open in his hand, and pointing out a passage in it with a long white finger and a triumphant air, the portlier Prebendary gesticulating warmly, with the flush of argument upon his cheery face. Ellesdon stole up behind them: then turned to his cousin with a loud aside:

“No, John; it is not theology, as I inferred, nor heresy, as you naturally imagined. I fear they are debating nothing better than the rendering of a pagan ode.”

The two clergymen looked round and burst out laughing. With a rueful glance the Canon slipped the little volume of Horace into the pocket of his coat.

“Humphrey,” he said to the Prebendary, “all hope of improving conversation is now over. Perhaps the young barbarians will tell us to what we owe this pleasant surprise.”

“Well, Johnny brought me here to meet the Wyndhams,” said Ellesdon. “And you know, sir, I’m always glad of an excuse to come.”

“I thought,” said the Canon, “that the Wyndhams had taken possession of Johnny altogether. So I had to fall back upon Horace, to remind me what the lighter side of life was like.”

Dr. Henchman winked at Johnny, but decorously, as only Prebendaries can. “If it’s only Frank Wyndham you’re wanting,” he said, “you’ll find him over there at John Coventry’s, where they expect both of you to sleep to-night. If by any chance”—he looked at Ellesdon

and his eyelid trembled imperceptibly again—"you wished to meet Miss Coningsby, she arrived there with the Colonel an hour or two ago."

He nodded his gray head as much as to say, "You see, I'm in the secret too." And presently, as the others strolled on in front, he whispered to Johnny, "How did you leave my friend, Miss Lane?"

"As well and as handsome as ever," said John diplomatically.

"I hear after all that you took her to Trent, and that queer dark groom of hers as well."

Johnny looked up in wary silence, and the Doctor nodded again. "I suspected the truth at Abbot's Leigh," he added, "and Frank Wyndham has since told Coventry and me. We're to hold a council of war to-night."

"Does my uncle know?"

"Not for the present; and they don't want to tell Ellesdon just yet."

Mr. John Coventry, son to the late Lord Keeper, and cousin to Colonel Wyndham of Trent, lived in a fine old brick house opposite to the King's Arms hostelry, near St. Anne's Gate which led into the Close. When Ellesdon and John Erle, the dust of their journey brushed from them, presented themselves to their host later on, they were received with a genial welcome, and found Colonel Wyndham awaiting them there. That evening Dr. Henchman joined them, and the five gentlemen sat long together talking of their plans.

"We're much obliged to you, Ellesdon, for coming so promptly," the Colonel said. "I should have ridden over to Lyme myself, but I was needed at home, and we knew that Johnny was a messenger on whom we could rely. You know what we're in want of?"

"I understand that you want to find a vessel to take one or two gentlemen to France."

"Exactly. There are now at Trent in hiding"—the Colonel leaned forward and lowered his voice as he spoke—"two friends of ours, distinguished fugitives from Worcester, and the objects of a hot pursuit. One of them is—well, he wishes to be known as Mr. Morton; the other I need not name. You won't mind if I don't go into more details?"

"I am content to know what you think it best to tell me, Colonel," said Ellesdon, smiling.

"Thank you, thank you," said Wyndham, evidently relieved. "In these cases it's safer for all of us to know no more than we're obliged. But both, my dear Ellesdon, are gentlemen whose capture would be a real misfortune, and more than that, a deep disaster, for the interests of the King. If you can help us to put them across the seas, you'll be laying us all under a heavy obligation, and rendering no small service to the cause we have at heart."

"I'll do what I can, sir," said Ellesdon simply, as the Colonel ended his little speech. "I was looking out already for a ship for Captain Wyndham, who is in my house."

"Ah, for Robert, to be sure! I hear you've been uncommonly kind to Robert. But I hope there'll be no need for him to cross the water. If he lies quiet for a time, I think we shall be able to make some terms for him. My guests are in a much more dangerous position: it's imperative that they should be got out of the country without delay."

The Colonel's voice grew more and more anxious, and Dr. Henchman was frowning over his folded hands. With a glance at the Prebendary, Mr. Coventry intervened.

"Mr. Ellesdon will understand that certain gentlemen who have been proscribed by the Parliament stand in a much more critical position than Robert Wyndham and others of our friends. I mean men like Lord Derby, who, I greatly fear, is taken, and other leaders of that stamp."

"Yes, yes," said Dr. Henchman, testily. "But our friends at Trent are not Lord Derby, and it doesn't seem to me to matter what their names may be. The point is that we're determined to get them off to France as soon as possible, and the question we want answered is, can Mr. Ellesdon help?"

John smiled to himself. "The Doctor doesn't beat about the bush," he thought. "But I wonder if it wouldn't be wiser to tell Willie the whole truth."

"I think I have a ship for you," said Ellesdon, slowly. "By good luck the master of it, an old tenant of mine, is just back from a voyage. We saw him last night and had a long talk with him. He's a shy fellow and difficult to move; but at last we got him to agree."

"Is it your ship, and are you certain you can trust him?"

"Yes, it's my own ship. The man is from Charmouth, a decent fellow of the name of Limbry, a good seaman and a man of his word."

"What did you tell him?" Mr. Coventry asked.

"That I wanted a passage to St. Malo for two friends of my own who had got into trouble. Like me he didn't ask for more details. Of course it's a matter of money; he'll want fifty or sixty pounds."

"Of course, of course; there'll be no lack of money," said the Colonel. "When could he be ready to take them on board?"

"On Monday night, or rather, early Tuesday morning. He proposes that our friends should come to Charmouth—

you couldn't find a quieter village on the coast—and then when the tide serves at midnight, he'll draw out from the pier at Lyme, and put in and pick them up near Charmouth. I've settled the spot with Johnny here."

The Colonel's eyes glistened. "You've done well, both of you. It sounds the very thing—the very thing."

Dr. Henchman's frown had vanished. But he was listening sharply to Ellesdon's every word. "Are there any of Cromwell's redcoats about in your neighbourhood?" he asked.

"Well, there's a muster going on at Bridport," Ellesdon answered, "and there are men passing between Dorchester and Lyme."

"Ah, there's an expedition getting ready for Jersey, isn't there?" said the Colonel. "Well, we must risk something, and it can't be helped."

He stopped as the door opened, and a servant brought in a letter. Coventry read it while the others waited in silence.

"Latour—Latour—Monsieur Louis Latour," he said. "Has anybody present ever heard of Monsieur Louis Latour?"

"Who sends him here?" asked Dr. Henchman.

"The devil, for aught I know. I beg your pardon, Doctor. But he brings introductions from Jermyn and from Killigrew"—naming two noted Royalist exiles—"and from some of our best friends in France. You had better show him into the parlour."

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Coventry and the ladies are there."

"Tell Mrs. Coventry first, and say I'll join them directly. We'll see what the gentleman is like. Meanwhile, Doctor, suppose you look at his testimonials;" and as the servant went out, Coventry handed to Dr. Henchman the letter with its enclosures which he had just received.

Colonel Wyndham had buttonholed Ellesdon and was talking eagerly. Dr. Henchman, who did everything thoroughly, was examining M. Latour's introductions with a detective's eye. Coventry came up to Johnny and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"So they tell me you've been distinguishing yourself again, John." He dropped his voice. "You've seen those wonderful new friends of ours at Trent." Johnny nodded. "Frank tells me there's an extraordinary resemblance, and I can quite believe it, though I haven't seen—your double—since he was quite a boy. We shall have to keep an eye on you, or you'll be playing tricks like Larkin—Parkin—what was the fellow's name?"

"Try Perkin Warbeck," Johnny suggested.

"To be sure! That's it. What a historian they've made you!" said Mr. Coventry, in whom the most elementary display of learning always excited wondering surprise. "But why didn't you bring your uncle round to-night?"

"Well, he said he had business."

"Business! I never heard of it yet in Salisbury Close."

"Well, Mr. Coventry, he didn't think he was wanted; and he is really working desperately hard, translating the poems of Mr. Herrick into Horatian verse."

"Horatian verse! Bless my soul, what erudition! Talk of Erasmus, he was nothing to you Erles!"

"Who talks of Erasmus?" asked Dr. Henchman, quickly, looking up like a war-horse sniffing a fray.

"Heaven forbid that I should," said Mr. Coventry, hastily. "Come and join the ladies, Ellesdon, and let's see who this stranger is."

The ladies were assembled in a long, low parlour panelled with oak and fragrant with the scent of flowers. At Mrs. Coventry's side upon a sofa sat Julia Coningsby, in fresh

white draperies exquisitely fair, and close by them was a ripe and handsome matron, Mrs. Hyde of Heale, whom it did not need a physiognomist to recognize, in spite of her ampler proportions, as a sister of Canon Erle's. Before them, discoursing with easy grace of manner, while his sharp eyes roved about the room, stood a tall and angular figure with a foreign air, who stepped forward with a fine bow as the gentlemen entered and Coventry advanced to welcome him.

“Why, Willie,” said John in a whisper, “here's our friend Mephistopheles again!”

But Ellesdon's eyes were fixed upon a daintier object, and in an extraordinarily short space of time he was exchanging greetings with Miss Coningsby in a deep recess at the far corner of the room.

M. Latour soon made his introductions and was very frank in telling the company about his plans, his doings, and himself. He had come from France on a visit to relatives in this country, and the authorities had been good enough to give him any passports he desired. His object was to settle some family business, but he was taking the opportunity to visit the West of England where he had spent some happy summers as a boy. That accounted, no doubt, for his command of English? Ah, Monsignor, the Bishop—no; he anticipated; the Prebendary—was very kind to flatter him so. Having had so many friends in England, and having met so many English gentlemen in Paris lately in these distracted times, he had ventured to ask for introductions to one or two of the leading gentry of the West, and that had brought him—so agreeably—to Mr. Coventry's house. He was very fortunate to find there Colonel Wyndham, of a name renowned for loyalty even across the Channel. Oh, as for politics, being a foreigner, he had no politics; but—with emphasis

—the present company could hardly doubt where his true sympathies lay.

“All very polite and handsome,” murmured Colonel Wyndham in the Prebendary’s ear.

“Yes,” said the Doctor shortly. “But I can’t stand his twisted eyebrows. M. Latour, have you been introduced to our young friend, Mr. Erle?”

What was Dr. Henchman’s motive, Johnny wondered, in suddenly pushing him to the front? If he had any idea of startling the newcomer, his design completely failed.

“I rather think that I saw Mr. Erle in the Close this afternoon,” said the Frenchman pleasantly. “He has an appearance one does not forget. He enjoys, I hear, the distinction of being Madame’s nephew”—he bowed to Mrs. Hyde, of Heale; “but he enjoys also a more dangerous distinction —”

The speaker paused and the conversation suddenly dropped. Except in the far corner where Ellesdon and Miss Coningsby were engrossed in their own affairs, there was for a minute complete silence in the room. M. Latour’s quick eyes had read everybody’s features, but no one moved or spoke. “Mr. Erle reminds me of a very distinguished person,” the Frenchman resumed, and then he paused again.

A new light seemed to break over Dr. Henchman’s face. “I believe I guess your meaning, sir,” he said slowly, as if some singular discovery were dawning in his mind. “There is a resemblance; I saw the gentleman in question when he was down here as a boy in ‘45.”

“I saw him last year in Holland,” Latour responded, “and the resemblance is startling and complete. You must have noticed it too, Colonel Wyndham?” His sharp eyes challenged the Colonel to deny it, for all the softness of his tones.

The Colonel's fingers were fidgeting with the lace at his wrist. It was curious how closely Latour's gaze seemed to follow the movements of his hands.

"I—oh—really, I hardly remember," Wyndham stammered.

"Ah, of course,"—the Frenchman's eyes were fixed upon him—"it is years, I suppose, since you saw the gentleman whom in this company I may surely call the King?"

For a just perceptible moment the Colonel hesitated. Then, as he faced his questioner, Johnny broke into a merry laugh.

"Oho, ho, ho! That is delightful! I always felt that I was made to be a King. Do say you see it, Colonel Wyndham," and he stretched out an imploring hand to lay upon the Colonel's arm.

But in doing so he stumbled over a footstool, and in recovering himself lurched up against a work-basket, the contents of which rolled in confusion on the floor.

Mr. Coventry's hand was on the stranger's shoulder. "That's a name," he said, "which we never mention, but you must drink his health with us before you leave."

The subject dropped. The ladies had run to the rescue of the scattered thimbles, needles, silks, and reels. John, on his knees, was struggling to collect them, and in that task the Frenchman proved an invaluable ally, turning and twisting with an agility most obliging to behold. When it was ended, Colonel Wyndham seemed to have drifted to a distant corner of the room, and Dr. Henchman loomed forbiddingly between; but, Johnny thought, as he rose from the carpet, that he caught an approving twinkle in the Prebendary's eye. Then Mr. Coventry seized on him to help him with the stranger, to whom he insisted on offering hospitality for the night.

"It's at the King's Arms that you've left your things? Why, that's kept by my old servant Hewett, and only just across the way. Johnny Erle will go and see about your luggage; and you must come with me and find a room upstairs."

Outside in the garden, where the stars shone like lanterns hung from the great spire overhead, Julia Coningsby and William Ellesdon were walking between the dew-dipped flowers, oblivious that the world held anything but them.

"I came because you asked me," he was saying, taking courage of her kindness and the night.

"I knew you would always help any friends of our cause who required it," she answered, deliberately evading the point which she loved to hear him urge.

"Are you interested in these gentlemen?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, greatly, very greatly. Oh, why," she added to herself, "won't they tell him who they are?"

"When may I come to Trent to see you then?" he asked irrelevantly.

"I think," she said shyly, "if you arrange this matter as you hope to, that I may come to Charmouth first."

"And visit me?"

The answer came so softly that he was obliged to bend very close to catch the words. And then Mrs. Coventry called to them from the window, and they turned and went back into the house again; and for Ellesdon the stars around the spire grew paler and the glory of the night went out.

When Johnny came back from his errand to the inn, he found M. Latour the centre of an attentive group, telling the most agreeable stories of the Court of France—of the dazzling young King who had taken the sun for his emblem,

of the famous Cardinals, Mazarin and Retz, fit rivals in presumption, suppleness and craft, of Condé, the wonder of the army and the first captain of the age, of Mademoiselle, the most eccentric of great heiresses, and of all the high-born gentlemen and ladies, whose selfish whims and gallantries and ambitions had so long plunged a great Kingdom into turmoil, its capital into rebellion, its people into misery and war. The Frenchman seemed to have grown quite at home with his companions. He had tales of Queen Henrietta Maria and the English Royalists in Paris, tales of their sufferings and privations, of their quarrels and intrigues, all seasoned with a spice of mischief that made them very humorous to hear. He seemed to have an astonishing knowledge of other men's affairs. Nay, in a single evening he seemed to have picked up in a surprising manner even the views, the dispositions, the relationships of the little company to whom he talked. He could speak with equal ease to Dr. Henchman about politics, to Mrs. Coventry about china, to Mrs. Hyde about dairy-maids.

"What do you think of him, Julia?" asked Johnny, as the evening wore on. Chance had separated them from the rest.

Miss Coningsby hesitated a moment. "I, Johnny? You know, I like him—very much."

John stared. "Do you really? I thought—but of whom were you talking?"

"Of Mr. Ellesdon, weren't you?" Miss Coningsby began, and then blushed scarlet at John's delighted grin.

"Oh, Julia, Julia! There are other hims besides our William. Do you think I need to ask you questions about that?"

"I really don't understand you, John," said Miss Coningsby, rising majestically.

But John caught her hand. "Forgive me, Julia. I'll never, never smile again. Tell me what you think about that Frenchman. I prize your judgment so much."

Miss Coningsby relented a little at the bare-faced flattery. "John," she said, "you are no better than a humbug, but I don't trust that man."

"Nor I," said John.

"But I've no reason in the world."

"Nor I," said John again; "it isn't a reasonable opinion. But it's yours and mine, for all that; and"—he turned his face away severely—"I dare say it is Willie Ellesdon's too."

She turned on him sharply, and with a laugh he pushed back his chair.

"Take care," she warned him, "or you'll have that work-basket over again."

"Ah, that was an accident," said Johnny. "I seem to gravitate to this corner. That basket was made to upset. But did you ever see a man so active as our French friend in picking up needles and pins?"

"Never. He seems to like to peer into everything. Ah, between you, you've left something on the floor."

"Where?"

"There," said the lady, and she swooped on to a tiny white object which had been revealed by the moving of John's chair.

"That's only fluff," said John loftily.

"No; it's paper. How funny!" Miss Coningsby unrolled it as she spoke. It was a wisp of very thin paper, folded into the smallest compass and covered with writing in a fine Italian hand.

"French," said John, "as I see at a glance."

"I see at a glance you can't read it," said Miss Coningsby.

“Can’t I? What’s that M at the end?”

“That,” said the lady, “is the signature of the writer, which is usually put at the end.” Then she paused, lifted the paper to her eyes and scanned it closely. “I wonder, I wonder!” she said. Then she suddenly crumpled it up and slipped it into her dress.

Johnny mildly protested. “I didn’t understand that paper to be yours.”

“You are young, John, and you understand very little,” Miss Coningsby answered. “I undertake to look after this paper. And as my education enables me to understand it, I think I am as capable of placing it in the right hands as yourself.”

She rose and sailed away towards the others, her head held high, her every movement full of grace. No wonder that a man’s eyes should follow her, thought Johnny, as intently as Ellesdon’s did across the room. Very soon Mrs. Coventry gave the signal and the ladies withdrew to bed.

“I must say, M. Latour,” Mrs. Hyde avowed, as she bade the stranger good-night, “that you have given us a delightful evening, with your entertaining tongue.”

“It is not only my tongue which is at Madame’s service,” said the Frenchman, bowing low.

“Charming, charming! Well, if you want to secure my gratitude forever, find me just now a dairy-maid. That, I think, will be beyond you. Good-night! Good-night!—These Frenchmen have such manners, Julia,” Mrs. Hyde confided in Miss Coningsby, as that young lady accompanied her up-stairs. “Englishmen now, beside them, seem so stiff.”

“Yes; but I prefer men wooden,” was Miss Coningsby’s reply.

Colonel Wyndham had drawn Ellesdon aside, and M. Latour was watching them with a genial smile.

"Those two friends of yours, Mr. Erle," he observed to Johnny, "have so much to talk over. One would call them confidants—or would conspirators be your English word?"

"Oh, no; that's not a word we use in England," said Johnny coolly, and the Frenchman laughed his most engaging laugh.

"You Englishmen always are so loyal—to each other as well as to your King."

John moved away. "Why," he thought, "should this man's compliments always remind one so unpleasantly of sneers?"

The gentlemen did not prolong the night. Dr. Henchman went home, he told the rest, to read the Fathers. Colonel Wyndham and Ellesdon were tired with their long rides. M. Latour would not detain them, though he did suggest a talk with Johnny, who excused himself—"having no intention," as he whispered to his cousin, "of being put upon the rack." Mr. Coventry received the house-keys on a silver salver brought by a servant as a matter of routine, and carried them laughingly up-stairs. "The keys of the fortress, you see, M. Latour, are entrusted to the Governor every night."

"No wonder, when it guards such treasures," said the Frenchman gallantly.

"Ah, Monsieur, the ladies ought to hear that. I fear it's wasted upon us." And so with mild humour the company departed to their beds.

M. Latour occupied a fine apartment; John Erle a little room next to it, at the stair's head. John heard the Frenchman lock his door, and once, later, he heard him moving in the adjoining room. But soon a deep quiet settled down

upon the house. Still Johnny did not fall asleep immediately, as his custom was. The excitement, the mystery, the adventure of the past week were telling on his splendid sleeping powers, and after turning and tossing for an hour or so, he sat up and beat the pillow vindictively with his fist. As he did so, something creaked distinctly. He stopped and listened. It was not his bed; it was not his furniture; it was not inside his room; it was not, he thought, next door. Was it his fancy, or was there an imperceptible rustling like the sweep of a gown in the passage outside? His door was not locked and it opened noiselessly. He stood there, holding it ajar. Was that pale light the moon upon the wall? No; the boy's hearing was acute; that was certainly a脚步; and the dim track of a shaded candle was flitting down the panels of the wall.

Without a word, Johnny slipped out in pursuit. Some one had gone down-stairs and turned into the corridor towards the parlour door; and through the darkness, barefooted, Johnny went in pursuit. He heard the mysterious step before him. He heard a door opened and an exclamation muttered in a foreign tongue.

“Ah! I thought the ghost was French,” he murmured, and crept on.

Opposite the parlour door he halted. It was open, and the Frenchman was inside. He had set down his candle on a table, and, his long dressing-gown trailing behind him, was groping on his knees upon the carpet just where, earlier in the evening, he had helped to pick up the work-basket's contents.

Johnny stood in the doorway, mercilessly watching while the Frenchman searched up and down the floor.

“He has evidently dropped something that he values. I suspect Julia could tell us what it is.”

M. Latour's search grew more anxious. He rose from the carpet and, candle in hand, examined sofas, tables, chairs. "It must have been here, it must have been here," he muttered.

"He'll be dropping candle grease broadcast," Johnny reflected. "In Mrs. Coventry's interest this must stop. Ahem!"

The ejaculation rang out stentorian in the darkness. With a sudden cry Latour wheeled round and raised his candle, and for an instant Johnny caught upon his features a look of mingled anger and alarm, which startled the boy with the malice it betrayed.

"Can I help you, M. Latour?" he began. "I heard some one moving and came down to see what it was."

With an effort at self-control the Frenchman understood. His stare relaxed. His shaking hand grew steadier; and the flickering candle burned more straight. The sinister expression faded, and the voice came naturally again, but sharper and more rasping than the suave tones of the evening before.

"Ha, ha, Mr. Erle! You quite startled me. I didn't expect to be discovered in my night wanderings here. But the truth is I found that I had lost a little keep-sake, probably when you set us scrambling on the floor, and I couldn't rest till I had come down to look for it myself."

He spoke quietly, but try as he might, the suavity had vanished. The sneer in the voice was uppermost just now.

"Well, let me join you," Johnny suggested. "It was partly my fault, I am afraid, that it was lost."

"No, no, Mr. Erle. It is useless, thank you. I've searched everywhere. We can do no more till daylight now. The thing isn't of any intrinsic value—only a small locket given me by an old friend."

“A locket, did you say?” Johnny couldn’t help asking.

“Yes, a locket, a tiny gold locket. It must have slipped from my pocket, I fear.”

“A locket,” John repeated. “Then I’ll have a hunt for it.” And in spite of M. Latour’s protests, hunt long and systematically he did.

But no trace of any locket did he find. At last he desisted, and together the two explorers reascended the stairs, the Frenchman full of polite apologies for the trouble he had caused.

“Of course I may have lost it before I arrived here. I may be mistaken in thinking that I dropped it there.”

“Mistaken? I think you must be,” John answered, with a curious dryness in his tones.

But it was not till he was back in his room that he let himself go:

“I’d wager a guinea to a ha’porth of onions that there was no locket in the case at all. That Frenchman was hunting for the paper which Julia found. I’d have told him of it, if he hadn’t lied to me. But if he wouldn’t speak of it, why should I? I won’t give Julia away for nothing, and that paper’s on her conscience, not on mine.”

CHAPTER VI

A KING IN HIDING

LIKE many another ancient manor, Trent House has fallen from its high estate, and no longer ranks in dignity or reputation among the famous houses of the countryside. But, to-day, though humbled and weather-worn by time, and though the front portions have been greatly altered, the back parts of the old building stand much as they stood two centuries and a half ago, when a discrowned King found safety inside their hospitable walls, and watched from their cunning recesses the baffled suspicion of his foes.

Lady Wyndham, the Colonel's mother, occupied a large bedroom in the upper part of the house, over the old kitchen which opened to the farmyard. This room was assigned to Charles, and the door into the yard which gave access to the kitchen below, was blocked for the time by a load of hay. Adjoining it, and communicating with it, was a small wing, the ground floor of which was covered by the brew-house, and the upper portion of which contained a secret chamber with a double floor, known as the "Priest's Hole," whither the King might fly for refuge in the event of the house being searched by troops. The great chimney also provided a means of hiding and escape. Here, in Lady Wyndham's room, with its black oak panelling, its deep window and its massive beams, with its handsome furniture and hangings, and its great carved and canopied bed, Charles was installed in much greater comfort than he had enjoyed since his wanderings began; and here, with

rest and food and a breathing-space of safety, his spirits rapidly revived. While his friends exerted themselves busily to find a means of getting him off to sea, he employed himself in winning the hearts of those about him, and in his younger days and his happier moments no man knew better how to do this than Charles.

Miss Lane had returned to Bentley with her cousin as soon as she had seen the wanderer safely housed at Trent, and the young King had parted from her with very genuine expressions of admiration and regret. A short time afterwards, when the lady and her brother were driven by the suspicions directed against them to leave home in disguise and to take refuge in France, Charles received them in Paris with a welcome which showed how deep an impression their loyalty had made upon his mind. And years later, it is pleasant to notice, when the wheel of his singular fortunes went round again, the restored King did not fail to mark in an unmistakable fashion his gratitude to the friends who had served him so bravely in his hour of need.

Happily, however, for the young man's entertainment, Miss Lane's departure did not leave him in despair. All the household, from old Lady Wyndham downwards, exerted themselves to the utmost to render his confinement tolerable to him, and none succeeded better in the task of cheering her Sovereign than Julia Coningsby, whose wit and gaiety banished his depression, and whose delicate beauty speedily enchain'd his heart. Even when the young lady insisted on accompanying Colonel Wyndham to Salisbury, declining, on the plea of the King's interests, Charles' laughing command to stay at Trent, his high spirits continued undiminished, though he assured Miss Coningsby that during her absence he should never smile; and for a day or two Hugh became his principal companion and the recipient of

the confidences which Charles was ever ready to impart. In those early days, when he had only just emerged from boyhood, and when the trials of a long adversity had not sapped his faith in human nature and soured his keen and supple mind, there was an irresistible charm about the gracious and unfortunate young Prince. The selfishness, which in later years absorbed all other passions, had not taken hold upon him yet. The self-indulgence, which in later years ruined his energies and disgraced his Court, had not yet degenerated into license ; it showed itself only in a winning deference, in a reckless universal homage, to women of all ranks alike, which, combined with his dignity and his misfortunes, won for him the warm affection of almost every woman that he met. The kindly word, the ready wit, the merry laugh, the easy temper, which distinguished him through life, were conspicuous already in his bearing and his talk. His bravery and his ability were on every side confessed. His frank urbanity and love of conversation—which in the view of a caustic and critical Bishop made him “an everlasting talker” on the throne—were a sure passport to popular favour ; and no one fell under the spell of them more completely than Hugh Wyndham, who was his constant companion during those few days at Trent.

As often as possible the little audience would gather in Lady Wyndham’s chamber, to hear the King discourse. Hugh, having duly made his rounds—for his father in his absence had laid on him the duty of keeping strict guard in the house—would come in and draw his chair across the doorway, and lay his sword on the table at his side. And then, at a sign from the King, they all would sit and listen, while Charles poured out his flood of reminiscences, and Lord Wilmot, with shrewd questions, led him on. Sometimes the talk would turn on the days of Charles’ boyhood,

on his movements in the West Country during the Civil War, on his visits to the Scilly Islands and to Jersey, on his adventures afterwards in Holland and in France, and on the ill-fated expedition to Scotland which had ended in the disastrous English march. He would talk with great freedom of his Royal cousin Louis of France, of the Cardinal Mazarin, who, he professed truly, was no friend or favourer of his, of the daring escapades of the great ladies of the Fronde, of the strange difference between the Court at Paris and his own brief Court, beset by grim Covenanting chiefs, at Scone. But more often they would lead him on to talk of the eventful journey which had brought him at last as a fugitive to Trent, of the strange and romantic adventures of the days immediately following Worcester fight.

“Ah, Mrs. Wyndham,” he would say with a smile to his hostess, who could never listen too long to the details of his flight, “I’m a shabby enough guest to entertain, as it is —” and he looked ruefully down at the coarse gray breeches which he wore. “But if you had seen me the night I came to Moseley, with a patched green coat, and a smashed steeple hat, and a shaven head, and a crooked thorn stick, even your loyalty would have been severely tried.”

“It would need a good deal more than a disguise to shake it, sir.”

“Ah, you don’t know. A King in rags and tatters, with walnut dye over his hands, is almost a premium on treason.”

“At which point, sire, in your wanderings since the battle,” asked Lady Wyndham, “was Your Majesty’s patience most severely tried?”

The old lady, herself a stately and imposing figure, always spoke to the King with a deep and formal courtesy strangely

at variance with his easy and familiar talk. But he turned to her at once in his engaging way.

“ That’s not the easiest question to answer, Lady Wyndham. I might say it was when I was disloyally forced to cut off my love-locks, or when Miss Coningsby yesterday insisted on going to Salisbury against her Sovereign’s commands — ”

“ Your Majesty is pleased to be merry,” said the old lady with an indulgent smile.

“ His Majesty,” Wilmot added, “ is never pleased to be anything else.”

“ There you wrong me, Wilmot. I have my moods of meditation too. And I had one, and I think one of the grimmest of all, Lady Wyndham, a fortnight ago in Boscobel wood.”

“ Won’t you tell us about it, sir?” asked Hugh.

Charles laughed and fell into an easy vein of reminiscence. “ You remember I told you how I spent the night after the battle—or rather the next morning, for we were riding nearly all the night. About daybreak we came to Mr. Giffard’s—what was his house called, Wilmot?”

“ White Ladies, sir.”

“ To be sure; it’s not a name I should forget. There we rested, and for safety’s sake they brought my horse into the hall. There too they took off my clothes and dressed me up as a woodman, and Lord Derby and Buckingham and our friends said good-bye. Then Richard Penderel, a faithful country fellow, took me through the back door like a scullion, and led me to a hiding-place in the wood; and there, while the troops were searching all the neighbourhood I passed a miserable day, hungry, wretched, weary to death with the flight and the battle, and wet to the skin with a deluge of rain.”

“And then, sir?” asked Hugh. The ladies were listening, with tears of sympathy already in their eyes.

“Then began our real adventures. That night I set out with Richard Penderel, resolved to get over the Severn into Wales, and so perhaps to Swansea or some other sea-town which has commerce with France. We set out on foot to find the ferry. But on our way we passed a mill, and I saw the miller, as I believed, in white clothes sitting by the door. It was a dark night, and he called out, ‘Who goes there?’ On which Richard Penderel answered, ‘Neighbours going home.’ Then the miller cried out most suspiciously, ‘If you be neighbours, stand, or I will knock you down;’ on which Penderel bade me follow him close and ran to a gate that went up a muddy lane, the miller crying after us ‘Rogues, rogues!’ Then some men came out of the mill, who, I believed, were soldiers, and we both fell to running up the lane, which was very deep and dirty, till at last I bade Penderel leap over a hedge and lie still to see if any one was following us. There we lay like logs for half-an-hour, and then as nobody came after us, we continued on our way.”

“But Your Majesty did not cross over into Wales?”
Mrs. Wyndham asked.

“No. When we got to the village on the Severn, we took shelter at the house of Mr. Wolfe, an honest gentleman who warned us that the ferry was watched and guarded by militia, and who hid us for the night in a barn behind a heap of straw. There we stayed all the next day till midnight; and then, Mrs. Wolfe having dyed my face and hands with walnut juice, we set out once again; but we gave up our hope of crossing into Wales and turned back towards Boscobel.”

“What weary work!” said Lady Wyndham, softly.

“Indeed it was,” said Charles. “That night, I remember, to avoid the miller, we had to swim a stream on our way back. We got to Boscobel about five in the morning—Saturday morning—I had been driven hither and thither unceasingly ever since we rode out of Worcester with the rebels behind us on the Wednesday afternoon—and there I learned that Major Carles, who had been with our army at Worcester and had gallantly covered our retreat, was in hiding in the adjoining wood. I told you of that, Mrs. Wyndham, yesterday.”

“Tell us again, sir. Please tell us all again.”

The King laughed. “No, no; I’ll cut it shorter. Mercy is the prerogative of Kings.”

“It was only God in His mercy who preserved Your Majesty,” said Lady Wyndham, in quavering tones.

“I think it was, old friend,” Charles answered, gravely; “for nothing else could have saved us in that wood. Carles and I lay hidden together all day in the branches of an oak, where peeping out we could see the soldiers beating the thickets for us underneath, our lives hanging on a movement or a whisper, or on the keenness of eye of the patrols below. Talk of excitement, Wilmot will tell you that I’m fond enough of excitement! But I confess I don’t want ever to pass so exciting a day again.”

“Was that the worst time of all, sir?” asked Wilmot.

“Well, it was the most critical; though I think I was really more wretched in the rain two days before. That night I had a bed—of a kind—in a closet in Boscobel House, and we had a glorious breakfast next morning. Carles, who is a man of resources, crept out at daybreak to a sheepfold near; for our stock of provisions was alarmingly short. There he stuck with his dagger the best wether he could find, and Penderel brought it home in triumph on

his back. But I cooked it, Mrs. Wyndham; I assure you they none of them could rival me as cooks. Then, that Sunday, we got a message through to Wilmot, who was in luxury, the traitor, in a cell between two floors at Moseley Hall; and at night we set out once more. I was on a horse, looking as dirty a ruffian as ever you could see, with a faithful bodyguard of Penderels to speed me on my way. We got safe to Moseley, none too soon, moreover, for Boscobel House was searched by the soldiers next day; and then after a night or two, they brought me on to Bentley, and there Miss Lane took charge of me, and all the rest you know."

"Thank God, thank God," said Mrs. Wyndham, gently. "Surely no King in history ever passed through such adventures yet."

"Surely no King in history," said Charles, rising and holding out his hands with a noble gesture, "ever found deeper devotion or was served by trustier friends."

It was still light that evening when their friends from Salisbury returned. Ellesdon had gone back to Lyme, to make the final arrangements for the escape of the two Royalist gentlemen whom Colonel Wyndham was to bring down to the coast; but John Erle attached himself to the Colonel and Miss Coningsby, and rode back in their company to Trent. What was more embarrassing, M. Latour who was going into Somersetshire, asked permission to join the party too. He had made himself most agreeable to the Colonel. He knew one of his brothers who was then a fugitive in France. His way led him, he had discovered, past the door of Trent. He would not trespass on the Colonel's hospitality, but he would think it an honour if he might ride with them so far. And the Colonel, who was the soul of courtesy, was not the man to shake him off.

Moreover, M. Latour had shown such delight in Miss Coningsby's company, such respectful admiration, such fine appreciation of her wit, and, greatly to Johnny's bewilderment, Miss Coningsby, laying aside her early prejudice, appeared suddenly to be so charmed with the new admirer she had found, that to refuse the Frenchman's request was out of the question, and to Trent accordingly their new acquaintance came.

As they rode, Miss Coningsby plied him with questions about his country and himself, questions so frank and artless that no man could choose but reply.

“So, Monsieur, you know the great Cardinal?”

“No, Mademoiselle, the great Cardinal is dead.”

“Mazarin dead!”

“No; Richelieu was the great Cardinal. I am a generation older, I fear, than Mademoiselle.”

“A man is as old as he chooses, Monsieur.”

“Ah, Mademoiselle, at this moment of all times I would choose to be young.”

“But you do know the Cardinal, at least the little Cardinal?”

“As all the little world may know a great man, yes.”

“No more? I should like to know such a man well. They say he has agents all the world over.”

“They say so much, Mademoiselle, that is not true.”

“Agents in every country, even here, who find out all our secrets. And Mazarin, Monsieur, is no friend to our poor King.”

“Mademoiselle, I am sure you do injustice to the Cardinal. Remember, he is no longer Minister. And they complain in Paris that he has too many English friends.”

“And yet none of the English exiles are among them. It is only our rebels that he counts among his friends.”

"Well, in France they do not find him fond of rebels. The rebels have driven him into exile just now. But the Church, Mademoiselle, is ever full of paradox, and even the lives of Cardinals are not always what one would expect."

On his side M. Latour had questions to ask her, questions which Miss Coningsby sometimes answered readily enough. But as often as ever the talk turned on English politics, on the sympathies of her relations, or on the movements of her friends, the young lady's replies, though just as voluble and ready, proved on essential points to be curiously baffling and vague. Once or twice it occurred to Latour to wonder if she was fencing with him, but the suggestion came up only to be dismissed. He was less on his guard, for his part, against the charm of her manner.

"Julia, sir, has made another conquest," said Johnny, laughing, to the Colonel behind.

Colonel Wyndham smiled. "Julia is always to be trusted."

"Down to the ground. But would you say as much for her companion?"

The Colonel pursed up his lips and answered nothing. He was thinking uneasily about his guests at Trent.

"Will he stay the night, sir?"

"I don't know what to say, John. I don't like turning the man from my doors, especially when he's a pleasant fellow, and a gentleman, and comes to us with such recommendations from our friends."

"Yet you don't altogether like him."

"Yes, I do; I do," said the Colonel hastily. "It isn't that I mistrust him——"

"I do," said John, bluntly; but he kept his reasons to himself.

"Only I can't run the risk of introducing strangers just

now to our party at Trent. And yet it seems churlish and even suspicious not to ask him in."

"He'd no business to put you in such a dilemma," John persisted; "I can't help thinking he's done it by design. I believe the safest thing would be to ask him in and risk it. We can all be on our guard; he'll discover nothing; and it's the best way of convincing him that we've no secrets to conceal."

The Colonel smiled. "You're a cunning young diplomatist." But it was Miss Coningsby who settled the question without recourse to them.

"Cousin," she called out suddenly, turning, "I've been making free with your hospitality, and persuading M. Latour to stay at Trent to-night."

John's eyes met Julia's for a moment, and a faint nod of appreciation passed from him to her.

"Julia, sir, is always to be trusted," he said demurely, "as you observed so justly a few minutes ago."

Mrs. Wyndham and her household were in waiting when the little cavalcade arrived at Trent, for Johnny had been sent on before to give warning, and Mr. Morton and his mysterious companion were nowhere to be seen. Old Lady Wyndham sent down an elaborate message of welcome to the French gentleman who claimed acquaintance with her valued son. Hugh busied himself in waiting on the stranger. Miss Coningsby could not do too much for her new friend. Towards dusk while the light still lingered, she volunteered to take him round the grounds, for the sunset was still golden on the tree-tops, and "if he insists on riding on early to-morrow, there will be no time then to show him the beauties of Trent."

M. Latour was full of interest and appreciation. He liked the view. He liked the sunset. He liked the quaint

old rambling house. John Erle and Hugh had strolled out after them, and they passed the two young men standing and talking at the corner of the yard. Then a curious incident occurred. Latour, glancing over the building, raised his eyes to the windows of Lady Wyndham's room, and suddenly stood, staring and transfixed; for there, apparent against the window panes, the last rays of the sun just lighting up his face, stood a dark-haired, dark-visaged youth, who was Johnny Erle surely, and yet a moment ago Johnny Erle was outside! He looked again, harder, and as he looked, the figure moved from the window, and the sunlight died.

But that instant gave Julia time. She had followed the Frenchman's glance, understood his amazement, and with incredible quickness had signalled to Johnny twenty yards away. And John with a quickness even more remarkable had read the signal, pushed Hugh forward, and thrown himself behind a buttress out of sight. When Latour turned to look for Johnny, he had vanished; Miss Coningsby, a little white perhaps, was smiling at his side; and Hugh Wyndham was sauntering towards them alone. It was all very odd, very rapid, but—the Frenchman was bewildered rather than convinced.

“That's a nice old room where Johnny is sleeping,” said Miss Coningsby lightly; “it has a stair leading straight to the yard. The house is full of queer corners and surprises.”

“And of hiding-places too, I dare say?” added M. Latour.

“Oh, yes, we've the usual resources. Hugh, I think after supper we must show M. Latour our Priest's Hole.”

Hugh hesitated imperceptibly before taking Julia's cue. “Well, if we can find the way to it,” he assented. “But I fear it's long been given up to rats.”

They reentered the house, and after supper Miss Coningsby carried out her proposal. M. Latour was taken to Lady Wyndham's chamber by the ladies, led by Johnny Erle, and shown the hiding-place over the brewhouse, where in the old days of the Roman persecution, priests of the elder faith had found a resting-place. The young lady became quite romantic over the sufferings of the ancient church, and M. Latour's sympathy was beautiful to see. Meanwhile Hugh was watching at the door of a room in another part of the building, as if treasures untold lay hidden there; and, reinforced by his father, that watch he maintained all night.

The Frenchman was both interested and pleased.

"If I were a fugitive—let us say from Worcester—I should know now where to seek a refuge, Mademoiselle."

"Exactly, exactly." Miss Coningsby entered into the idea quite gaily. "And we should be proud to hide him, shouldn't we, Cousin Anne?"

"Any honest gentleman would be sure of a welcome at Trent," Mrs. Wyndham assented, with an emphasis on the epithet which every Royalist understood.

"I wish Cousin Frank would bring us home a fugitive," said Miss Coningsby with amazing candour. "I am sure there are plenty at Salisbury and all over the countryside."

"Child, child!" Mrs. Wyndham cried reprovingly.

"Oh, M. Latour won't betray me. We have no secrets from our friends, Cousin Anne."

Did Julia over-play her part out of sheer love of mischief? Were M. Latour's suspicions too deep to be dispelled? Or was he only an uneasy sleeper, who could not refrain from walking in the night? John and Julia had guessed the danger, and the rest of the household had with a little hesitation consented to follow their lead.

“ Give him plenty of rope,” said Johnny ; “ let him think that he’s seen everything. It’s the only way of convincing him that there’s nothing more to see.”

But M. Latour was a gentleman not easily misled even by the most engaging candour, and the habits of a lifetime had taught him to verify his suspicions for himself. It was towards two o’clock in the morning that, undeterred by his misadventure of the night before, he rose with elaborate secrecy and stole out of his door. He was determined to see for himself who was sleeping in the large and handsome bed-chamber, which it seemed singular to have assigned to Johnny Erle. Besides, Johnny Erle had presumed to spy on his movements at Salisbury, and there is always a certain sweetness in revenge.

The house was very still. There was nothing to suggest to the Frenchman that only a few yards from him on an adjoining staircase two gentlemen were watching by a closely guarded door, and that two other occupants of the old house were lying awake and listening, foreseeing with shrewd sagacity some such action on his part. He crept softly along a narrow passage, down a short stair, and found himself—for his sense of locality never failed him—at the door of the room which he sought. There he paused to listen. All was quiet, but he thought that he heard a light snore. He tried the handle ; the door was unlocked, and it yielded. He pushed it back and noiselessly entered the room. Again from the great canopied bed there came the same sounds of a sleeper, a deep regular breathing, a light snore, a slight rustling of the clothes. With a hand shading the light which he carried, Latour advanced to the bedside, and raised his candle to illuminate the sleeper’s face. Even then he could hardly avoid a start. The young man was lying with his face turned full towards him, every feature visible, as if

challenging his gaze. And gaze he did, with a long and careful scrutiny, and with an expression in his sharp eyes by no means pleasant to see.

“No; the likeness is certainly amazing,” he muttered, as at last he drew back towards the door. “But that is undoubtedly the young barbarian, Erle; it must have been he whom I saw this afternoon.”

Was it a dream, or some more lively instinct, which called forth upon the young barbarian’s features a broad smile of exultation, as he slept? Was not the light sound which reached Latour’s ears, as he closed the door behind him, more jubilant than any ordinary snore? It is hard to say; but in any case the Frenchman’s suspicions had subsided, and for the rest of the night he enjoyed undisturbed repose. When he set out early next morning to pursue his journey to his Somersetshire friends, Miss Coningsby was down, a little pale perhaps, to help Mrs. Wyndham give him breakfast, ere he went. Johnny Erle had been round to the stables and had seen to his horse himself. Colonel Wyndham sent a kind message of excuse. And from an upper chamber two bronzed faces—one so dark as to be rare in Northern lands—watched him with keen and laughing eyes, as he set forth.

“I think I’ve seen those twisted eyebrows somewhere,” said Charles in a meditative voice.

“So have I, sir, in Paris, if I mistake not.”

“Ah, indeed; in Paris,” said the King.

It was a strange way into Somersetshire that the Frenchman took. After proceeding for half a mile Westwards, he turned suddenly sharp to the South, and wheeling round again, re-entered Dorsetshire and set his horse’s head to the South-East. As he rode, he took from his pocket a little note-book and thoughtfully consulted its contents.

“Trenchard’s,” he said to himself ; “yes, that will be my best course. I will go back to Wolverton ; Sir Thomas will expect me there. And I shall find out what the Government is doing and whether they have any fresh information to give. I must know who is this Ellesdon, and what they were planning at Mr. Coventry’s house. These Wyndhams are negligible at present, though that is a lovely girl—a lovely girl. Let me see——” he took out his note-book again. “Sir Thomas has no son, but a nephew—yes—a nephew, young, in Morley’s regiment, hot-tempered, reputed to be wild and a little in debt. Sir Thomas is not liberal. So much the better ; that kind makes the best instrument ; and I need agents, more agents just now. M. le Cardinal, I must have a fresh remittance, and I think I must have a hold on that young man.”

It was late afternoon when Latour drew near to Dorchester. The road had been dusty, but now the shadows were deliciously cool. A farm-waggon was jogging along in front of him, driven by a country lad ; and inside it there sat, looking serenely beautiful, a tall and handsome country girl. The Frenchman reined up and bowed with his nation’s courtesy ; and the girl smiled back at him out of a pair of wonderful blue eyes.

“Can you tell me the way to Wolverton, Sir Thomas Trenchard’s house ?” he asked.

The driver grinned and pointed to some distant chimneys. “We be going there ourselves,” he said.

“Ah !”

“I often go there, sir, to help when there is company. My aunt is housekeeper at Wolverton,” the handsome girl explained.

“You come from these parts then ?”

“No, sir ; my home is near Lyme ; my father’s a sailor.

But I work at Amory's Farm near Charmouth in the downs."

"I see. And we are bound for the same quarters. I expect you know Sir Thomas and his family well?"

"Oh, not Sir Thomas," the girl began, and then blushed vividly, the scarlet dyeing her cheek, her neck, her brow. Latour watched her with pleasure: then suddenly shot a bolt at a venture.

"You know some other members of the family better?"

The girl turned her head away. The driver stared hard at his horses, but a slow smile overspread his face.

"I wonder," said Latour to himself, as he rode on slowly, "if by chance I have found already the hold on that young man which I require."

CHAPTER VII

METHODS OF DIPLOMACY

M. LATOUR found a considerable party of people assembled at Sir Thomas Trenchard's house, with whom, though most of them were strongly attached to the Puritan persuasion, he found it quite as possible to sympathize as he had done with the Royalists at Salisbury and Trent. Indeed, he was able to do so here with more sincerity, because it was his object and that of his employers to cultivate the friendship of the new Commonwealth and of its civil and military chiefs, and among those chiefs, in the South Western counties, Sir Thomas Trenchard was held in high esteem. Latour, himself an astute, assiduous self-seeker, recognized a kindred spirit in his host, and suspected, perhaps unfairly, that the baronet's rigidity of conduct and religion concealed a worldliness as deep and restless as his own.

But what surprised Sir Thomas was the marked attention paid by the clever Frenchman to his graceless nephew, Tom. Young Trenchard had come over from Lyme with Captain Macy, one of the officers in his regiment which was now quartered there, to receive, as he generally did, but a cold welcome from his relations. To Sir Thomas it was always a grievance that he had no son of his own. The three young ladies, his daughters, trained by their mother in all the severity of Puritanism, without its fine simplicity, its deep fervour, its spiritual charm, regarded their cousin for the most part with a shocked and jealous disdain, which he returned with a rough carelessness not likely to conciliate their love.

"It is clear," said Latour to himself, as he watched the young ladies' demeanour, "that it is not for the bright eyes of his cousins that the young gentleman comes here."

It was not difficult therefore for a man of the world with ingratiating manners very quickly to make friends with Tom. To the lad, who felt coldly treated, awkward, and defiant, he appealed with a geniality, a consideration, a deference for his opinion peculiarly flattering and welcome. He drew him into talk, agreed with him, listened to him with attention as an equal, laughed gaily at a shy joke on which Tom ventured, hinted a good deal of sympathy with his desire for independence, invited his company when he found him left moodily alone ; and, ere long, Tom was talking to him with a freedom which would have astonished the relatives who regarded him as surly, reticent, and proud.

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Trenchard," Latour confided in him, "I was wondering if it was merely respect for your uncle or admiration—very natural admiration—for the Mesdemoiselles, your cousins, which had procured for me the pleasure of meeting you here."

They were strolling together in the gardens by the moonlight. The rest of the company had withdrawn. But Tom was a devotee of tobacco, and M. Latour had asked permission to join him in his stroll.

"My cousins ! Heaven forbid !" said Tom in genuine alarm.

The Frenchman laughed with a jollity that warmed the heart. "Eh, eh, you ask more than that already ; and you are only—let me guess—two and twenty, three and twenty, Monsieur ?"

"I'm only nineteen," said the boy with a faint touch of shame.

"Is it possible ? You have the air, if you will allow me

to say so, of a much older man." Tom glanced up suspiciously, but the face of the speaker was courteously grave. "You come, no doubt, to enjoy the beauties of Wolverton. It is a charming property, of which one day perhaps you are destined to know more."

"Not if my Uncle Thomas can help it," said Tom bluntly. "There's no love lost between us, you see."

"Indeed! But, if I recollect, Mr. Peter Trenchard has a no less charming property not far away."

"Oh, charming enough," Tom admitted, "but mortgaged already for a good deal more than it will stand."

"Still, there is nothing like land, Mr. Trenchard, land, and an ancient name."

"All very well," said Tom, "but give me ready money. I'd sell my pedigree any day for cash."

"For shame!" said the Frenchman, but he laughed in the pleasantest way. "And I, now—so unequal the world is—would give a good deal of ready money for such advantages as yours."

"Pity we can't drive a bargain," said Tom, laughing too.

"Perhaps we might. Who knows?" said the Frenchman. "Youth, good looks, ability, I can't buy ——"

"Oh, come," said Tom.

"I mean it, Mr. Trenchard. If I mistake not, you have all these things. And though you can't sell them, you can use them, if you care to, to win influence, independence, wealth."

"Only show me the way," said Tom.

"Ah, I wonder now—I wonder, if I could. You see, Mr. Trenchard, I suspect you have expensive tastes."

"How do you know that? Where do you see it?" asked Tom smiling broadly.

The Frenchman took his arm and pointed upwards.

"I rather think," he said, "that I see it there."

They were standing at a corner of a terrace, and facing one side of the great house, where, in the upper part over the kitchens, the servants' quarters lay. The night was as warm and serene as a night of summer. The stars strewed the ways of heaven above them, and behind there rode magnificent the moon. At a window above, the light streaming full upon her, illuminating and refining the beauty of her face, stood the girl whom Latour had seen in the waggon on the road, whom Ellesdon had admired at a distance in that strange glimpse among the Charmouth downs. As the Frenchman spoke, Tom lifted his eyes to the window, and a deep colour overspread his cheeks, a colour reproduced as vividly, though the kind night partly hid it, in the cheeks of the girl above. In another minute the window had been closed; the girl had vanished; and Latour's queer smile and penetrating eyes were turned upon the young man at his side.

"I compliment your taste, Monsieur. Such beauty would serve as an excuse for many follies. I had the pleasure of meeting the young lady on the road, as I came, and her modesty would seem to be as rare as her good looks."

"How did you know I knew her?" stammered Tom.

"By a simple process. This afternoon I happened to ask your friend the way to Sir Thomas Trenchard's, and I marked the effect of that name on Mademoiselle. After that, to find the gentleman in whom she took an interest was a comparatively easy task. Don't think that I would intrude upon your confidence, Mr. Trenchard. It is absolutely safe with me. Only, no man who has an eye for beauty could help envying you your good fortune and congratulating you on your taste."

Tom blushed and stammered again. Latour's smile soft-

ened, and with something like a gesture of affection, he laid a hand upon the young man's arm.

"Have we not all been young?" he said.

The cynical smile had vanished. The sympathy, the almost tender sympathy, in the man's voice went home to a soft spot in the boy's heart. And in the dark and the loneliness he suddenly poured out his confidence to his new friend.

"Ah, M. Latour," he said, "you don't know how I love her, how beautiful and good she is!"

M. Latour was too profound an observer not to know how strong an element in a young man's love the belief in goodness is. Whatever his real feelings at this outbreak, there was nothing but respectful sympathy in his tone, as he replied.

"I think I can understand," he said. "And the young lady, Miss —"

"Limbry," said Tom, "Rose Limbry. Her father is the master of a merchant ship at Lyme, and of a very respectable family, but Rose is of course very different from them all."

"No doubt; still *your* father, Mr. Trenchard, would not be likely to approve."

"My father! He would never let me marry yet, and certainly he wouldn't let me marry Rose."

"Marry! Oh, that is more serious!"

The boy straightened himself and looked his companion bravely in the face. "You forget, M. Latour," he said with genuine dignity, "I love her, and I won't betray her love."

Latour grasped his hand. "Your sentiments do you honour, Mr. Trenchard. And in this Republican country class distinctions need not rule our lives. An honest love

is more precious than rubies, and a beautiful woman graces any position which she fills."

If there was a lingering sneer in the voice, it escaped his companion's notice, and almost immediately the Frenchman resumed in clear firm tones:

"Mr. Trenchard, I think I see a method of helping you to win the independence you require."

The boy's face brightened. "I'd give anything, everything, for that."

"You know perhaps," said Latour deliberately, "something of my—mission—here."

"No, I know nothing—except that you are my uncle's friend."

"I have friends among all parties, Mr. Trenchard; that is a necessity of my position. But just now my objects and your uncle's are the same—to strengthen the Government of the Commonwealth, and to defeat the plots of its opponents."

"How do our Government and its opponents interest you?"

"That, my friend, is a question of high policy, into which we need not go. It is sufficient to say that this is the fixed determination of Cardinal Mazarin, who will soon again direct the destinies of France, and that I am here as His Eminence's confidential agent—his confidential agent—to secure information for him and to further by every means available the objects which he has in view."

"Ah, you are Mazarin's agent!"

"I need not say, Mr. Trenchard, that I am speaking in the strictest confidence to you. Your friends here of course know something of my mission. But it is essential that it should not be suspected on the other side. To the Royalists I am a French gentleman full of sympathy for their

misfortunes. 'To the Puritans I represent the real Government of France. To you ——'

"Yes, to me?" said Tom, as his companion paused dramatically.

"To you, if you care to help me, and you would be helping your own party too—I am willing to be a generous employer. His Eminence is a princely paymaster—to those who serve him well."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Tom.

"I want more agents, men of standing and discretion, to supply me with information—public, private, personal, all kinds. I am now concentrating my efforts on these Southern counties; I have reason to believe that they are honey-combed with plots; that the King himself is in hiding within them ——"

"The King?" ejaculated Tom.

"Yes, the King of Scots, or the Prince, or the Pretender, or whatever he is called. There is a thousand pounds' reward for his apprehension, Mr. Trenchard. It is a useful sum, a thousand pounds, and from His Eminence there might be more. They call Mazarin a miser, but he knows the value of good agents; he will spend freely in rewarding them."

"But what could I do?" Tom repeated.

"Collect information and supply it to me. Keep your eyes open and your ears alert. Nothing is too small to notice or report. Remember I ask for no services that a gentleman need hesitate to give."

"No; of course not," said Tom, a little doubtfully.

"I should ask you only to do in a confidential and informal manner what every gentleman who supports the Commonwealth is bound to do—to take precautions against the intrigues of the enemies of the State."

"I see," said Tom.

"To speak plainly, Mr. Trenchard, it does not suit His Eminence's projects that the representative of the Stuarts should be restored in England or should return as a pensioner to France. On the other hand it would be a gratification to him to win the support of your Government and your military chiefs. However, these are matters beyond us. My immediate need is a colleague and ally, to keep me informed of all that is doing in these parts. He must be a gentleman of standing and ability, and connected with the army, like yourself. He must be a scrupulous and high-minded man. He must be convinced that in acting with me in this manner he is doing real service to his country's cause. And he must consent to accept, of course in confidence only, an honorarium for the work he does."

Latour paused. Tom was thinking, as deeply as his intellect allowed.

"It is not a thing to be decided hastily," the Frenchman added. "And indeed I would invite no man to undertake the task, if he had a shadow of a doubt about it. But I do not expect to find much difficulty in securing a colleague willing to earn perhaps some hundreds yearly in such delicate and confidential work."

"I don't know that I could do what is wanted," Tom stammered. "Some hundreds, some hundreds yearly"—the words seemed to be thumping in his ears.

"Ah, Mr. Trenchard, you must allow me to be the judge of that. And now, good-night. It is late, and even in summer your English nights turn cold."

But M. Latour had not misjudged the young man's weakness, or calculated in vain upon the young man's need. Whether the agent was worth the price paid for him, and what services the Frenchman's deep-laid plans foresaw, is a

matter on which doubt is possible. But no one who heard the jingle of guineas in Tom Trenchard's pocket next week, and who had been present at their talk in the gardens on that September night, could have doubted that M. Latour in the end had vanquished the lad's scruples, and had prevailed on him to accept, for the sake of Rose and independence, a prepayment from Paris for the services which he was to render to his country's cause.

Miss Rose Limbry did not stay long at Wolverton, after Sir Thomas Trenchard's guests had dispersed, but returned in her waggon to her home between Charmouth and Lyme. Towards the same district, the neighbourhood of Charmouth, other persons and interests were converging too, as important to the cause of English history as to the progress of our tale. Mrs. Margaret Wade, the landlady of the "Queen's Arms" Inn at Charmouth, was surprised to receive one afternoon visits from two travellers as engaging as any whom she had lately entertained. Widely different as were their rank and methods, the errands on which they came, and the language in which their admiration for their hostess was expressed, both visitors showed in the most agreeable manner a high opinion both of the lady and of her house. The first comer was a quiet-looking fellow, who appeared, what he professed to be, a confidential serving-man; and when he heard that the day of his arrival—the 22d of September—was market-day in Lyme, and that consequently rooms in Charmouth and in all the neighbouring inns were scarce, he expressed so much chagrin and pressed his hostess so insistently, that she was obliged to ask him to argue out the question in her snuggery behind the bar. Here Mr. Peters, that was the traveller's name, expanded, ordered a bottle of wine, drank the health of Mrs. Wade, and confusion to all her other admirers, and finally unfolded to her such a pathetic

tale, that the lady's heart was genuinely touched. And when Mr. Peters put down a silk purse on the table, through the threads of which a stock of coins were clearly seen, and intimated that they were at the landlady's disposal as an earnest only of better pay to come, Mrs. Wade began to consider whether she could not stretch her house or rearrange her guests, so as to provide for that night only the two bedrooms which he urgently required.

" You see, ma'am," our old friend Peters argued—he liked nothing better than a little piece of mystery and diplomacy like this—" my master's situation is not an ordinary thing. I don't know if you have ever loved, ma'am ; they say the sweetest faces go with hearts of stone ; but I'm quite sure that many men have loved you ——"

" Upon my word, Mr. Peters ! "

" Quite sure, ma'am, upon my word and honour too ! And having been loved so widely, you must have some pity on a gentleman like my master, who has sacrificed everything for love."

Mrs. Wade sighed, and sipped Mr. Peters' wine.

" I must tell you that my master, a very gallant gentleman, loves a certain lady in Devonshire better than his life. But though he is her equal in fortune, rank, and character, and though she has loved him devotedly for many months, he cannot persuade her guardians to consent to the match. So he has determined ——" Peters paused.

" Go on," said Mrs. Wade.

" To run away with the lady," said Peters impressively ; and Mrs. Wade set down her glass and clapped her hands.

" They will pass here to-night, and rest for a few hours probably, and then ride on again. He is taking her to his own relations, where they will be married ; and two or three friends of his family are acting as escort on the way."

“ Why, it is quite a romance,” said the landlady gaily.

“ It is. And I am sure you, with your kind heart, Mrs. Wade, will never stand in their path. You see, they must rest here—there is no other inn of any standing in the place.”

“ Well, there is none equal to the Queen’s Arms, though I say it.”

“ Of course not. It’s the Queen’s Arms that must take them in to-night. You wouldn’t have a true love-story turned into a tragedy, or a brave and pretty lady put to shame. You wouldn’t have them waiting in the street or hustled in the tap-room.”

“ Heaven forbid!” said kindly Mrs. Wade.

“ All that they want is a couple of rooms—the quieter the better—for a few hours after dusk to-night. I expect they’ll start again soon after midnight. Now, you won’t be so hard as to tell me it can’t be done.”

Peters lifted the purse on the table and the coins chinked encouragingly within. He raised his glass and drank a health to his hostess, and she smiled back encouragingly at him.

“ To-night, you say, to-night,” she wavered. “ If it only weren’t fair-day in Lyme.”

“ All the more reason for sheltering my master and his party. He’ll never forget what he owes you, Mrs. Wade.”

“ Well, I suppose I must try to manage,” the landlady capitulated; and as she spoke, and Peters rose and grasped her hand quite warmly, the door of the little room opened, and a deep voice with a slightly foreign accent called her from without.

Peters slipped through the door. “ You won’t forget; towards dusk this evening; we shall rely on you,” he repeated in low firm tones, as he passed out. And the newcomer heard the words and marked them, as his keen eyes

under their twisted eyebrows watched the retreating figure of the serving-man. Then their owner turned to his hostess, who was weighing a purse in her hand.

"I trust," he said with lofty politeness, "that I am not driving the gentleman away. I can well understand that he is unwilling to go."

Mrs. Wade laughed. This new visitor's tongue was quite as agreeable, and he certainly had a more distinguished air. Busy as she was, the landlady couldn't grudge him a few minutes of talk. The newcomer was a gentleman evidently. He was on his way to Lyme. He believed that Captain Macy's company was quartered there, and with Captain Macy a young friend of his was serving now. What times these were, stirring times for the soldiers, and scarcely less stirring for the owners of well-known inns! How had he heard of the Queen's Arms? Why, they had told him in Dorchester that he wouldn't find a better in the county, wherever he might look. How sorry he was to hear that it was full; no wonder! Of course travellers were always passing to and fro. Perhaps he might have found room, if he had come a little sooner, before that gentleman who had just gone out. Oh, that was no gentleman, wasn't it, but a serving-man, a very decent fellow; and Mrs. Wade had said just the same to him. Only in his case there had been special circumstances; and so by degrees, with nods and winks and hints and smiles and whispers, the details of the romantic love-story came out.

M. Latour listened and thought, and then dismissed the matter. Was it a ruse? No; there was no reason to suppose so, and these rustic elopements did not amuse or interest him. He was on his way to Lyme, and on his journey thither had determined to pay a visit to Miss Rose Limbry's house. He stayed a short time at the inn for rest and

refreshment, and in that time he extracted from his hostess a good deal of information about the Limbry family. The cottage where they lived was close to the shore, among the downs on the way to Lyme. Stephen Limbry was a very decent fellow, master of a small merchant vessel, which Mr. Ellesdon owned.

“Mr. Ellesdon, eh, Mr. Ellesdon! Would that be the handsome young gentleman whom he had met at Salisbury a few days before?”

Mrs. Wade had no doubt that it was so. She had a great deal to say about Mr. Ellesdon. The family had long owned property round Charmouth. She well remembered the Major, his father—and a very fine soldier he was—in the days of the war. Yes, Mr. Ellesdon, Mr. William he was, lived in Lyme now and owned a ship or two: they often called him Captain Ellesdon there. Stephen Limbry sailed one of them for him, and she believed did well enough. Oh, yes, she knew him, and would see him more often, but that his wife was rather a shrew. She had been Kitty Cole, a farmer’s daughter, very pretty and had held her head very high. But, as all the world knew, she was born with a temper, and that had been against her through life. After all it wasn’t much of a match for Farmer Cole’s daughter to marry the master of a little sailing craft.

“No; but it is only in rare cases, rare delightful cases,” M. Latour pointedly suggested, “that good looks and sweet temper are combined.”

Mrs. Wade laughed. Her visitors were really very civil. Had the Limbrys any children? Oh, yes, they had a daughter, Rose; and a very handsome girl she was, far better looking than her mother had ever been, and far better tempered too. But there—the time was running away, and her tongue was running on forever.

"No matter. There will never be any lack of men to run after it, or after its owner, Madam, I foresee." With which blunt compliment M. Latour bowed himself out.

There was more life than usual in the little village in the downs, with its steep street and its quaint old houses, and its blue-eyed, red-lipped children swinging on the garden gates. Riders and walkers, farmers and traders, peasants and shepherds, were already returning from the fair at Lyme. M. Latour observed them lazily as he ascended the hill towards the West. Then, following Mrs. Wade's directions, he quitted the road and made his way across the downs towards the left. He found presently the cottage he was seeking; it nestled under a sloping hill, and faced, regardless of the winds, straight out to sea. A path, which he followed, led down towards it, and beyond it on the other side there rose another path that climbed the ridge. As he turned his horse into the track, another horseman appeared at a short distance riding away from the cottage on the further side; and the light from the West caught his features and revealed them to Latour's careless glance. The Frenchman saw to his surprise that it was the serving-man with the romantic story, whom he had encountered at the Queen's Arms an hour before.

"Now, I wonder," he said to himself, "I wonder, what a runaway couple from Devonshire can want at Stephen Limbry's house." He reined up and reflected, as he watched the rider vanish across the downs. "After all," he added, "Rose is at home, and the serving-man may have an eye for beauty; and probably that is all."

But when Latour discovered from Rose Limbry, whom he was glad to find in the cottage alone, that the rider in question had been there to speak with her father on Mr. Ellesdon's behalf, he began to ask himself what Mr. Elles-

don had to do with it, and to wonder if any mysterious connection existed between Ellesdon and the runaways coming to Charmouth, between Limbry and the assiduous serving-man. The master of the cottage himself was absent. Mr. Peters, Rose explained, had waited for him in vain, and had now ridden off in the hope of finding him somewhere on the way to Lyme. M. Latour asked a good many questions about Peters. He was not Mr. Ellesdon's servant, it seemed. He belonged to the household of Sir Hugh Wyndham at Pilsdon, but he was staying with Mr. Ellesdon now. And Sir Hugh had a son, Captain Wyndham, had he not, the Frenchman queried? Miss Limbry thought he had, but couldn't be sure. Altogether the visitor found a good deal of food for speculation, as he sat with Rose, talking in the porch in the sunshine, while the gulls circled over the sea outside.

But when Mrs. Limbry returned and joined them, the interest and the noise of the conversation increased. The good lady had been in Lyme for the fair, and had come back full of agitation, and with a dangerous light of anger in her eyes. She had seen the proclamation threatening with the penalties of treason all who harboured the friends of the fugitive King. She had heard from a gossiping and malicious neighbour that her husband, who had only just returned from a voyage, was said to be already fitting out for a fresh cruise—a cruise of which she, his lawful wife, had yet heard nothing, and the objects of which were a mystery to her. When Rose told her of Peters' embassage from Mr. Ellesdon, and when Latour, playing on her fears, began, partly from mischief and partly from curiosity, to suggest that Limbry was dabbling in conspiracies and had fugitive Royalists concealed in every cabin of his craft, Mrs. Limbry announced her fixed determination to have it

out with her husband, as soon as he returned. And the Frenchman laughed to himself as he wondered whether he was innocently making mischief for Ellesdon and his friends. If he was, so much the better; the innocence perhaps was doubtful, but the love of mischief in the man was strong.

“In these days, Mrs. Limbry, you really can’t be too careful. You never know what schemes these Royalist gentry have on foot. And they never scruple to drag into them any poor fellow whose help they may happen to need.”

“I know; I know; and then, if harm comes of it, there’s no one to help us out; and the poor fellows who trusted the gentry, are left to face the law and to shift for themselves.”

“Shocking! Shocking! You can’t trust these fine gentlemen”—the speaker’s eyes rested for a moment, not very pleasantly, on Rose. “I wouldn’t let my husband go anywhere in these times, Mrs. Limbry, until he could give a good account of all he meant to do.”

“I won’t let him out of my sight,” said the lady with a sharp touch of temper, “till I know what he is after. You may trust me, sir, for that.”

And as Latour rode away Westwards, with his peculiar smile upon his lips, he thought he might rely on her to keep her word.

“Who is he, did you say, Rose, and what did he come for?” asked Mrs. Limbry, as soon as the visitor had gone.

Rose explained what she knew. “I suppose he wanted to see father. He didn’t say. He was on his way to Lyme.” She did not think it necessary to enlighten her mother as to the sudden interest which this stranger had developed in Mr. Tom Trenchard and herself.

"More mysteries! Hm! I shall give Stephen a piece of my mind about them."

Rose shrugged her pretty shoulders. She knew that form of her mother's generosity too well.

CHAPTER VIII

A FALSE START

ON the 22d of September, 1651, a little party of horsemen rode out early from the gates of Trent. Colonel Wyndham and John Erle led the way, and were immediately followed by Juliana Coningsby riding double behind the King, who, still dressed in his rough gray suit and disguised as William Jackson, acted the part of groom to the lady, as he had done to Miss Lane before. In the rear, at a little distance, Lord Wilmot followed with Hugh, steadily refusing to disguise himself, to the laughing annoyance of Charles, who protested that when Kings were "cropped, dyed, and degraded," it was little short of treason for subjects to insist on looking smart. The King's spirits had risen at the prospect of action and the new possibility of escape. He had shaken off his weariness and depression during his short stay at Trent. He was full of hope, as the day went forward and they rode rapidly South. Lyme Regis, he declared, was a name of good omen; full of Roundheads as it might be, it was the King's town and would serve him royally yet. As for Mr. Ellesdon, who was to provide the means of safety, he questioned Miss Coningsby merrily about him; and the more the lady blushed, and the more she fenced with his enquiries, the more persistently he pressed his questions home. Long before the day was over, Charles was assuring his beautiful companion that, if she would speak the word, he would stay in England, and enter the lists against Mr. Ellesdon himself; and as she put aside his laughing flatteries, he

vowed it was hard that the one aim of all his acquaintance should be to get him off their hands as quickly as they could.

“ Yet, if Mr. Ellesdon only succeeds in that to-day, sir,” said Julia demurely, “ he will render us all the greatest service that a man can do.”

“ And deserve the greatest reward that a man can win, eh, Mistress Coningsby !”

“ That is, sir, the thanks of every loyal subject in the land.”

“ If I were Mr. Ellesdon,” said Charles pointedly, “ I would sooner have the love of one.”

He looked round. Miss Coningsby was smiling mischievously. He guessed it, though he could scarcely see her face.

“ And of what was Miss Coningsby thinking ?”

“ Frankly, sir ?”

“ Quite frankly.”

“ Miss Coningsby, Your Majesty, was just then thinking unaccountably of Miss Lane.”

Charles laughed as merrily as if he had not a care in the world, till Colonel Wyndham turned in his saddle and cast a warning look behind.

While the little party were making their way rapidly towards the sea, Ellesdon was anxiously awaiting their arrival, and counting the hours till they could reach the coast. Robert Wyndham, whose wound was mending and whose friends had been exerting themselves on his behalf, had left Lyme and had gone for a time into hiding in a gardener’s cottage on his father’s estate; so that Ellesdon was relieved of anxiety on that score, though he kept Peters with him for the present as an invaluable servant and ally. Of the two Royalist gentlemen, fugitives from

Worcester, whom he had engaged to help in their escape, Ellesdon was content to ask nothing. He knew that the Wyndhams answered for them, and that they were important and devoted adherents of the Royal cause. He knew that the Colonel attached the greatest value to their safety. He was pledged to do all in his power to carry the scheme through. The story which by arrangement with Colonel Wyndham he had told to Stephen Limbry, the ship's master, the story which was to be impressed upon the little crew, was that Mr. Morton was a merchant travelling with his servant to St. Malo as secretly as he could, having been broken in his estate through the action of a rascally agent in France, and being for the moment, in consequence, in danger of arrest. What truth lay cloaked in this elaborate story, or who in reality Mr. Morton and his groom might be, William Ellesdon may perhaps have wondered, but like the loyal soul he was, he forbore to enquire. But for all that he could not avoid a certain restlessness, which increased steadily as the day wore on.

That morning Ellesdon had been down to the cobb at Lyme to make sure that Limbry's preparations were well forward, and the skipper had shown a little impatience at the importunities of his employer.

"Well, well, Stephen, you mustn't mind my being anxious. You must remember I've pledged my honour to see my friends safe through."

"All right, all right, sir; and I've given my word to help you. The craft's all ready. I have got four men aboard her. We have taken in our ballast, and our victuals for the trip. At midnight we shall put out from the harbour, and an hour or so later, I'll send in the long boat to pick up your friends. You have told them where to meet it."

"Yes, I'll see to that," said Ellesdon; "and you may rely upon the guineas being there as well."

In the afternoon Ellesdon had waited impatiently for the return of Peters from the Charmouth inn. There Mr. Morton had another tale prepared for him. He was to be the runaway bridegroom, and Miss Coningsby the bride. Peters at last reported that all was satisfactorily settled, and received in turn his instructions for the night. Then Ellesdon felt free to go and meet the friends whom he expected, and ordering his horse, he rode slowly out of Lyme.

Half way between Charmouth and Lyme Regis there lay at that date near the Axminster road a lonely house, belonging to Ellesdon, but occupied by a shepherd, whose absence he had arranged for and on whose friendliness he knew he could rely. This was the place where he had appointed to meet Colonel Wyndham and his party on their way to Charmouth, and to communicate the last details, and towards this spot at dusk he turned his horse's head. As he rode out of Lyme a solitary horseman passed him, and wheeling called his name. Ellesdon turned and recognized the singular features of the foreigner whom he had last seen in Salisbury Close.

"It is Mr. Ellesdon, surely," said Latour with an insinuating smile.

Ellesdon bowed stiffly. He was by no means delighted with the encounter, and did not wish to be delayed.

"Now I wonder if you can direct me, Mr. Ellesdon? I have an introduction to a certain Captain Macy, who holds a command in Lyme. Ah, don't look shocked. I know he's a terrible Republican, and I have no love for those kind of people either on your side of the water or on mine. But I understand the Captain has authority, and I have a little piece of business which requires his sanction, so I

must bow down in the house of Rimmon. Now can you tell me where this Captain lodges in your town?"

"No, I can't," said Ellesdon bluntly. "But they will know at the town-hall."

"Ah, to be sure. I always forget your admirable institutions. I will ask there. You are not returning?"

"Not at present."

"I hope we may meet later, when you do. I see that you are riding towards Charmouth—like all the world just now."

In spite of himself Ellesdon started. Did the Frenchman mean anything by the slight emphasis laid on the last words? Did Latour's keen glance cover any suspicion or were his own nerves playing him tricks? Without more talk he bowed again stiffly, and trotted off into the gathering dusk. Latour watched till the shadows enclosed him, and then proceeded, smiling thoughtfully, along the road to Lyme.

Ellesdon reached his destination none too soon. He had hardly admitted himself—the house was empty, as he had arranged—and bestowed his horse in an adjoining barn, when he heard the noise of hoofs upon the roadway and saw Colonel Wyndham dismounting at the gate. The Colonel introduced his companion.

"This is the merchant, Mr. Ellesdon, whom you are to help across the seas. Our other friend, his servant, is following with Miss Coningsby, and the two boys are a few minutes behind."

"I am heartily glad to see you," said Ellesdon, smiling. "Everything is ready for Mr. Morton and his servant, and the rooms at Charmouth are engaged."

Wilmot held out his hand. "You are doing us, Mr. Ellesdon," he said with graceful dignity, "the greatest possible service—a service that the King will not forget. My

friend, the groom, wishes his name to be kept secret, but you are welcome to know that you have Lord Wilmot's grateful thanks."

" You are Lord Wilmot? Then I am doubly glad to be of use to you; for every one knows of your lordship's services to the cause we have at heart. If you will lead the way, Colonel, I will go and bring the others in."

He held the door for his guests to enter, and then leaving them returned to the gate. A few paces from the house, in the dusk, a horse had halted, and its double burden was preparing to dismount. Ellesdon watched for a moment—it was a spectacle he never tired of watching—that dainty, girlish figure that he loved so well. But as the man touched ground, he caught sight of his features.

" Why, that's Johnny riding with her," he said to himself with some astonishment. " I thought they said that Johnny was behind."

He opened the gate and was passing through to welcome them, when something arrested him, and he paused. The man on the ground—Johnny Erle, as he thought—had put his arm round Miss Coningsby, quite needlessly, as if to lift her down, and was holding her hand, as a lover might, and looking up into her face.

" I may have no other chance of thanking you," he was saying in a low voice that threw much into the words, and he lifted up her hand and kissed it warmly, and she left it unresistingly in his.

" That is all you will give me, Miss Coningsby? "

She laughed lightly; then lifted his hand impulsively to her lips. " You know that all we have is yours, sir," she said in a voice which trembled a little, but sounded unquestionably sincere. Then she leaped to the ground by his side.

"Say you won't forget me," the man whispered.

"Never, never," she answered with feeling, as she turned to walk towards the gate.

But Ellesdon was gone. He had stalked into the house already, with a deep flush on his face and a sharp pain biting at his heart.

"The others are coming," he told the Colonel shortly. "I will go and see if the provisions which I ordered are here." And he departed abruptly to the kitchen, leaving Colonel Wyndham to welcome the rest. Poor lad, he had hoped so much, had looked forward so fondly, to the meeting of that afternoon! Was it not for her sake—because she had asked it chiefly—that he had spared no pains to put this adventure through? Was this his reward? Was that little scene an example of her fidelity? Or did she speak to all men so? But that Johnny, Johnny, a mere boy, his own cousin—Johnny, who had again and again listened to his hopes and vows—that Johnny should turn and supplant him and betray him! That was more than he could bear. He must wait a bit. He couldn't face them. He couldn't trust his self-control.

He walked up and down the little kitchen; then waited, his hands clenched in anger, thinking; and then renewed his walk. Other things must wait; he could think of nothing else for the moment. The bitterness of his disappointment blotted out everything; his own pain was too keen. He heard voices—her voice—in the parlour behind him. He heard dimly more horses arriving, men dismounting, near at hand. He opened a door at the back and stepped out into the yard—he must have air to cool him—and suddenly found himself face to face with Johnny Erle!

His first impulse was to draw back. "Hullo, Willie, here we are," said the traitor cheerfully. Then Ellesdon's anger

mastered him, and he stepped forward and gripped the boy's shoulder tightly.

"What do you mean by it? Out with it, man! What do you mean by it?" he cried in a voice which admitted of no mistake.

Johnny paused. The words bewildered him. The tone amazed him. The grip on his shoulder held him like a vice. "Steady, Will," he said quietly; "what's happened? What's upset you? And just leave go there, will you——"

"Not till you tell me," broke in Ellesdon, "what you were saying to Miss Coningsby just now."

"To Julia Coningsby?"

"Miss Coningsby, sir!"

"Oh, by all means. I've said nothing. I haven't been in speaking distance of her for the last two hours."

"You lie!" Johnny swung himself free roughly. "I saw you with my own eyes talking to her five minutes ago outside the gate."

"You're dreaming, Will. Ah, stay, are you sure it was I?"

"I'm certain. I saw you, I say. You were riding with her."

"No; she's riding with—Jackson; I haven't ridden with her all day."

"Don't tell me——"

"On my honour, Will," said Johnny gravely, and something in his voice made Ellesdon pause. "I have only this moment got here. Ask Hugh, who came with me. The man you saw is exactly like me—my double—but it wasn't I."

Ellesdon was shaken. "Come and see for yourself," said John, and he led the way in. "And, Will, this man is—in

a strange position. You must make allowances. Don't take too literally anything he says or does. And for heaven's sake, don't misunderstand anything she said to him."

"There was no misunderstanding possible," said Ellesdon miserably. "Oh, Johnny, I beg your pardon, if I've wronged you. I couldn't believe you'd do it. But there was no mistaking what she said."

"Ah, you don't know," said John, "you can't know. Wait a little." But Ellesdon only shook his head.

They made their way into the parlour, where all the rest of the party were assembled now. Miss Coningsby came forward to greet Ellesdon, with a look of which no lover could complain. But the young man only took her hand mechanically, and dropped it with a look of mute reproach. The girl shrank back, hurt and puzzled, while Ellesdon advanced and bowed very stiffly to a swarthy figure in grey, whom Lord Wilmot briefly introduced.

"This is my friend, Mr. Ellesdon," said Wilmot, "who desires to thank you as heartily as I."

Ellesdon's eyes involuntarily wandered from the stranger's face to Johnny Erle's. The resemblance was certainly amazing, and the voice—ah, yes, that was the voice which he had heard. The stranger was speaking to him with a graciousness which touched him in spite of himself. After all, was it a crime—was it a wonder—that any man should try his hardest to win Julia's love? The cruel thing was that he should so quickly and so easily succeed.

"We must hold a council," the stranger was saying. "We have an hour or two, haven't we, here? And Mr. Ellesdon will oblige us still further by telling us once more exactly what we're all to do to-night."

But while the little conference proceeded, Johnny drew

Julia aside. A cloud had come over her brightness. She seemed silent and suddenly tired.

“Julia,” he whispered, “I want a straight answer. Did our friend who rode with you make love to you to-day?”

Miss Coningsby flushed proudly. “Don’t be angry,” Johnny pleaded. “It’s not impertinence; there’s a good reason why I want to know.”

The lady looked down. “No,” she answered, with some hesitation. “At least I wouldn’t let him. He can’t help it, you know.”

“No man could,” said John, “under such conditions. But was anything said particularly affecting, when you left him at the gate?”

“Nothing that all the world mightn’t have heard, I’m certain.”

“Would all the world have understood it, if they hadn’t known who he was?”

“Perhaps not. But why? Who did hear?”

“Willie Ellesdon; and he’s in despair.”

“Mr. Ellesdon! Oh!” Her whole face lightened, and she looked across at the drawn brows of her lover with a sudden lovely softness in her eyes. “And he minded? I am so glad he minded. And, Johnny, you’re a dear.”

“The rooms at the Queen’s Arms are taken,” Ellesdon was saying in a dull mechanical voice; “they will expect you there in about an hour. Peters has prepared them for a runaway couple, who are to be free to leave at any hour of the night. Limbry’s vessel will put out to sea at midnight, and his boat should be off the shore an hour later at a spot which Colonel Wyndham knows. I think you may rely upon the crew. Peters will be on the lookout on the

beech, and will bring word when it is time to leave the inn. It would be better I think, as I am known in Charmouth, for me to go quietly home."

"Excellent!" said Charles; "it all seems to be admirably planned. I like that idea of the runaway couple. Is that the part that Miss Coningsby plays?"

"It is," said the lady, advancing. Her eyes were on Ellesdon still.

"Then, Wilmot, I claim to be bridegroom. I'm sure you'd make an admirable servant in my place."

"That, sir," said Julia, "is surely a matter for the lady. I fear Lord Wilmot has a better claim than you."

"I'll never admit it, unless you confess to me that there are others with a better still than his."

Julia hesitated. "I—I thought so once," she stammered almost inaudibly. Her face flushed scarlet, as Ellesdon rose, pushed his chair back sharply, and muttering some excuse made for the door.

But Charles' quick eyes had seen how matters stood. He had noticed the man's figure at the gate waiting to welcome them. He had noticed its sudden disappearance, and Ellesdon's marked constraint with him. He had followed more than one of Miss Coningsby's glances, and had guessed something of the mischief he had made.

"Mr. Ellesdon," he called, and his voice rang with decision. "Come back, please. I have something to tell you. There must be no misunderstandings here. Blame my rank and my misfortunes, not my conduct, if loyal ladies sometimes show me a kindness which gentlemen mistake."

"Sir," said Ellesdon sharply, fresh anger in his voice.

"The privileges which you would refuse to a rival, Mr. Ellesdon, you will not grudge to a fugitive King. You

don't need my word to assure you that a certain lady would never give me more than a King might fairly ask."

Ellesdon stared, amazed, dumbfounded. Charles laughingly stretched out his hands to both.

"Come! Two loving subjects shall not misjudge each other, because one of them judged too kindly of her King."

Ellesdon was on his knees by the King's chair already, and Julia had laid a hand upon his sleeve. In the rush of enlightenment and relief he blamed himself severely. What a fool, what a blind, suspicious fool he had been! What spirit of mischief had possessed him to think evil, when the truth was so simple and so clear? What bitter pain he had given himself for nothing! What cruel injustice he had done the woman he loved!

"Oh, sir, Your Majesty!" he stammered, as he pressed his lips to Charles' hand.

The King rose, smiling. "Stay! That was Miss Coningsby's offence, I think," he said as he withdrew his hand. "How do you know that she will pardon an action which so offended you?"

Then he turned his back upon them, and put his hand through Wilmot's arm.

"Was it wise, sir, to disclose yourself?" asked Wilmot.

"Yes, Mentor," laughed the King; "it was. Half-truths are always causing trouble. It is better to trust a man of that sort entirely, if you trust him at all."

They passed into the adjoining room, where food was ready. Colonel Wyndham and the two boys followed, and the lovers were left alone.

"Julia, can you ever forgive me?" She looked doubtful. "I shall never forgive myself."

"Well then, I suppose I must," she answered smiling. "But, Will"—her voice was grave—"though white seem

black, still you must trust me. Next time, you know"—she smiled again—"it might not be a King."

It was dark when Peters, watching from a convenient doorway, saw a small party ride into Charmouth and draw up at the entrance to the Queen's Arms. In a moment he was standing by the double horse's head, and helping Miss Coningsby to dismount.

"Take great care of this gentleman, Peters," she said, indicating Charles. "No"—in answer to his stare—"it isn't Mr. Erle."

After a brief conversation Wilmot led the way into the inn, and almost immediately Mrs. Wade, the landlady, appeared upon the threshold, romance and sympathy beaming from her eyes, and stretching out both hands to Miss Coningsby, drew her almost affectionately in.

"Come in, my dear, come in. You're very welcome; my lady, I should say, I'm sure. But there, I'll ask no questions. The rooms are ready, and you can leave at any time you like. I'm sure I wish you luck. It's not my business. But I like to see a woman brave."

With a sudden impulse of shame and confusion, Julia bent and kissed the good lady, as, followed by Colonel Wyndham, she accompanied her up-stairs.

For a moment Charles was left outside with Peters. Ellesdon had returned to Lyme; and Hugh and Johnny had gone down towards the shore together, to watch for Limbry's vessel and to bring the first news of it to the Charmouth inn.

"Now, sir," said Peters, "I will take the horses, if you will go inside."

"But I'm the groom," said Charles; "my name's Will Jackson. I must go to the stables first with you."

"Very well, sir;" Peters smiled slowly. How much,

the King wondered, did he know? Well, at least, the man must know that he was helping a Royalist gentleman who wished to remain unknown.

They went into the stables, which were full already, but they found a corner in which to fasten the horses. As they were doing it, a clatter of hoofs sounded on the cobbles, and a young officer, with a couple of troopers behind him rode into the yard.

“Here, fellow,” he called to Peters, as he flung himself from the saddle. “Take my mare and hold her a few minutes, while I go into the inn. I’m patrolling the district, and shall want her directly again.”

“If you want the ostler,” Peters answered stiffly, “you’d better ring that bell.” As he spoke, he recognized the officer. It was Tom Trenchard, whom he had encountered on his drive from Sherborne the week before.

“Oh! Ring that bell then,” called Tom to one of his followers. “Here, ostler, hold these horses for a while.”

The ostler came out, a hard-featured, surly fellow. But his face lit up, when he saw the red-coats in the yard. “Are you from Lyme, sir?” he asked. “I served once in Captain Macy’s company myself.”

“Then you can look after his troopers,” said Tom, as he threw him a coin.

“And, ostler,” interposed Charles, who had stooped to examine Lord Wilmot’s horse, “take this horse, will you, round to the smith presently, for he seems to have a cast shoe?” He rose and moved towards the entrance of the yard, and a light from a window fell across his face.

“Hullo, Erle!” called the young officer suddenly. “What in the world are you doing here?”

Charles turned to face his questioner, when Peters broke in with a warning face,

“Don’t you see, Mr. Erle”—Peters’ hand was on Charles’ elbow—“it is young Mr. Trenchard, whom we met the other day?”

“To be sure,” said Charles heartily. “We are always meeting, aren’t we, Trenchard? And what are you doing in that fine uniform at this time of night?”

“Oh, I’m on duty, patrol duty. In these days of rebellion, we’re bound to keep a sharp lookout.”

“Quite right, and you’re the man to do it. Well, I wish you luck, I’m sure.” All the while, Charles was watching Peters’ face, and the man’s nod of approval told him that he was on the right tack. “I’m here for the night, with Colonel Wyndham.”

“Where from?” asked Trenchard.

“Why, from Trent of course. Good-night, now. Keep a sharp lookout for rebels; and let me know, Trenchard, if you catch the King.”

“The King! You mean the King of Scots, Charles Stuart! There are no Kings in this country now.”

“Of course I do. He’s not much of a King at present!” And Charles glanced whimsically over his own rough suit and shabby person, as with a laugh and a wave of his hand he left the yard.

He found Colonel Wyndham outside, looking for him anxiously, and together, followed by Peters, they rejoined the others up-stairs. Charles was in high spirits, laughing over his adventure. “Mr. Erle’s black face,” he said, “is worth another life to me. But that’s no reason, my friend,” he added, laying a kind hand on Peters’ shoulder, “why you should look so white.”

Tom Trenchard’s patrol, which was due to Latour’s sug-

gestion—for he had vaguely advised Captain Macy to keep an eye upon Charmouth that night—worked no one any mischief; and after a time he and his men departed up the road. But the Frenchman's suggestions in another quarter, the hints dropped, the warnings offered to Mrs. Limbry in the cottage on the cliff, were destined to have memorable results. A very stormy interview had awaited Stephen Limbry on his return that evening to his home. He had no sooner come in, than his wife and daughter set to work to question him, Rose with a certain gentle reluctance, but her mother with a sharp persistency which no evasions could restrain. And when he confessed that he proposed to go to sea again immediately, on a secret, it might be a perilous, errand, to transport to St. Malo a couple of gentlemen who had got into trouble at home, Mrs. Limbry, who was full of Latour's warnings and of the proclamation against assisting rebels which she had read in Lyme that afternoon, set to work to bombard him with tears and protestations, and with all the artillery of persuasion which only strong men can resist. He would be discovered, to a certainty, his ship would be seized, his person arrested, his livelihood gone, herself and her daughter widowed, orphaned, ruined. If he cared in the least for his family, for his wife, for his duty, he would even now at the last moment abandon his iniquitous design. Fifty pounds, sixty pounds, and Mr. Ellesdon's anger! What were they to a lifetime in prison, to a ruinous fine, to a blasted career! Nay, so strongly did she feel, that she would never permit it! Sooner than that, if he persisted, she would herself go and give information that very night in Lyme! In vain the poor ship's master tried to stem the torrent. In vain he went out and wandered up and down bewildered—his wife and daughter following him—in the garden outside. In vain he retreated to his chamber, and

prepared to get out his sea-chest for himself. He knew his wife for a determined woman. But he little knew the lengths to which affection, over-powered by fear, may run. While he was busy up-stairs with his preparations, his wife defiantly locked him in his room; and there protest and threaten, argue, entreat, kick, shout, and swear, as he might, she kept him resolutely imprisoned till midnight had long passed, till the dawn had risen and all chance of performing his bargain had gone by.

Outside, on the shore in the darkness, a light fog had crept up and obscured the moon. Hugh and Johnny were marching up and down together, waiting, wondering, fearing, gazing blindly into the misty sea. Backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, now up on the cliff, now almost into the water, at every creek and corner, now as far along as Charmouth, now almost into Lyme, they paced, together and alone. And still the hours passed, and in vain they looked and listened. No sign of a vessel, no trace of man or of boat was there.

At Lyme, in his solitary lodging, Ellesdon passed a restless night. He had been down to the pier, just before eleven, and had found everything ready and the men expecting their captain every moment to arrive. Then a watchman came up, and knowing he could rely on Limbry, Ellesdon thought it better to avoid suspicion and to ask the watchman to see him to his door. For a long while he stayed at his window, till the fog made it useless to stay more. Once he fancied he caught the sound of seamen's voices in the distance, and fondly thought he heard the splash as of a rope's end falling in the sea. And on that he slept uneasily until the dawn.

But in the Queen's Arms at Charmouth there was no sleep for the party of watchers up-stairs. Midnight passed,

and they made ready for a start. One o'clock came, and they began to listen at the window. Hugh or Johnny should be there by now. Half-past one, three-quarters, two, struck from the old church steeple, and their uneasiness increased. Peters, who was waiting in the street below, was summoned, and sent to find the two boys on the beach. Presently he came back, with no news to give them. The young men were still watching. They were certain that they had missed nothing. Perhaps the fog had delayed the vessel. They would still wait there, and one of them would report later on. Three o'clock passed. Julia Coningsby was struggling bravely against the weariness which weighed her down. Charles sat, trying to sleep, and dozing fitfully; but his bright cheerfulness had disappeared. Lord Wilmot and the Colonel sat by with anxious faces, one near the door, one by the window, wakeful, harassed, looking very grave; and from time to time they would cross over to each other and confer. And still the minutes ticked themselves away, and the slow hours dragged uselessly along.

Between three and four Johnny came in to see them. But he had no good news to bring. The fog, he said, had lifted, and the sea was clearer. But no sign of a boat was to be seen. Still, by the King's desire, they waited, though Lord Wilmot, who had now given up all hope of the vessel, was for moving on. Johnny was sent back to the shore again. But their hopes were now dying very low. The night was nearly over. Across the roofs of the village street there stole in faintly through the window the dim beginnings of the dawn. It was almost light when Peters returned from a last fruitless errand to the weary watchers on the beach.

"We have been fooled," said Wilmot bitterly, "fooled or betrayed again." He never quite forgave Ellesdon for the disappointment of that night.

Charles roused himself. "No, Wilmot," he said; "blame no one. The odds are heavy against us. Kings were not meant to run away. Colonel, will you wake your cousin, gently? We had better be riding on."

CHAPTER IX

IN THE BUSTLE OF BRIDPORT

IT was hardly light when a strange spectacle attracted the notice of the watchers on the shore. A short and thick-set figure was coming down from the cliffs towards the sea, walking with a seaman's roll, and dogged by a couple of women behind him, who seemed to be keeping guard upon his movements. When he saw the boys, he turned his steps towards them and hailed them with an indistinguishable cry. Then Johnny's keen eyes identified the seaman whom he had visited with Ellesdon at Lyme the week before.

“Hugh,” he said eagerly, “I believe that's the rascal whom we've been waiting for all night.” And he started off at a run to meet him, while Hugh followed with black anger in his face.

Limbry it was, released at last by his determined wife, overcome by shame and vexation, and stammering out the lame and curious story which he hardly dared repeat.

The two young men regarded him in silence. They had some excuse for the indignation in their looks.

“I never heard a more contemptible story,” said Hugh curtly, as he turned upon his heel and walked away.

“Tell your wife,” said John loudly—Mrs. Limbry was waiting within earshot of their talk—“that she has made you shame yourself, dishonour your employer, and work incalculable mischief to honest men who trusted in your word.”

With that outbreak of hasty rhetoric, which he found himself unable to control, John turned after Hugh towards the cliffs, followed by a wail of stammering protest from the unhappy seaman on the beach, and by a loud note of angry rejoinder from his less tame-spirited spouse.

“ Could any man ever have believed it ? ” said Hugh bitterly, as they climbed towards the road. “ That the whole elaborate scheme of half a dozen men of pluck and purpose, should be wrecked by a hysterical woman and a henpecked fool like that ! ”

As they mounted the cliff, they saw Peters coming towards them, and thought that they heard a horseman disappearing away to the West.

They told their story. The whole scheme of course had been abandoned. What was it proposed to do next ?

“ Lord Wilmot has ridden off to Lyme,” said Peters, “ to see Mr. Ellesdon. He sent me to fetch you, and to ask you to join him on his return.”

“ And the others ? ” asked Hugh.

“ Colonel Wyndham and Miss Coningsby and the—the other gentleman——”

“ Will Jackson ; ” Johnny’s eyes met Peters’ ; “ we must keep to that,” he said.

“ Yes, sir, William Jackson and the others have ridden on to Bridport, to the East. We are to wait for Lord Wilmot, at the house above here, where you were last night, and we are all to rejoin the Colonel at Bridport as early as we can.”

“ Bridport is full of troops for the Jersey expedition,” said John doubtfully.

“ Yes, sir ; but Lyme Regis is full for the fair ; and they thought it safer to go on than back.”

“ All right,” said Hugh, and he led the way rather wearily

across the hill to the solitary house where Ellesdon had received them on the previous day.

Meanwhile the King and his two companions had taken leave of the Charmouth Inn, but had left unconsciously the seeds of suspicion behind. The ostler whom Trenchard had summoned into the yard the night before, was an old Puritan soldier of a determined cast, and one or two little incidents had made him doubtful as to the character of Colonel Wyndham's party. At Charles' own request, he had taken Lord Wilmot's horse round to the smith the night before, and Hammet, the smith, an observant fellow, had set the ostler's thoughts on an exciting track.

"Why, this horse," he said, as he supplied the missing shoe, "has been doing some travelling lately. He's got three shoes on, all set in different counties, one in Gloucestershire, one in Staffordshire, and one in Worcestershire, if I make no mistake."

When the ostler returned to the inn, he attempted to question his mistress, but he got neither sympathy nor information out of Mrs. Wade. Moreover, he shrewdly suspected that the landlady was little better than a Malignant at heart. When the party left in the morning, he eyed them very closely, especially the dark young fellow whom Tom Trenchard had hailed the night before. What had he called him? Erle? Yes, that was it. Well, he admitted a Royalist intriguer was hardly likely to have a friend among Captain Macy's men. But even as he acknowledged this objection, his suspicions flared up again, for this young man Erle, whom Mr. Trenchard had treated last night as a gentleman, was now being freely addressed as Will Jackson, and was undeniably acting as a groom. And to make matters worse, the fellow—just like the unblushing effrontery of those Malignants—wrung the hostess' hand at

parting, and actually bent to kiss her cheek! Clearly there was something wrong with the whole party. He would be off, as soon as possible, and put the facts before the Parson. The Parson would advise him; he at least was no back-slader. And who knew—he slapped his thigh at the bright inspiration—but that the runaway lady might be a man in petticoats, quite possibly Charles Stuart himself?

Meanwhile, unconscious of the ostler's meditations, or of the storm which they were soon to brew, Charles and his two companions rode bravely on to Bridport, into the centre of the enemy's camp. As they entered the town, they realized that it was full of troops, and Colonel Wyndham pointed out the danger, and suggested that it would be wiser to strike inland towards the hills.

"No, no, Frank," the King answered, "I told Wilmot we would wait for him in Bridport, and wait for him I must. Besides the boldest course is generally the safest. We'll ride to the principal inn of the place, and take a room and see it through."

"But you, sir; what will you do?"

"Oh, leave it to me; I'll act my part of groom. It's the best way to stick to the parts we've chosen, and the least likely to excite remark."

So at the door of the George Inn our travellers alighted, and the Colonel and Miss Coningsby were shown into a private room, to wait with an anxiety which every minute deepened till the groom had disposed of their horses and could join them again up-stairs.

As for Charles, his spirits rose with the approach of danger, and leading the horses he made his way into the stable-yard. The yard was full of soldiers, cleaning their horses, loafing, drinking, chatting, and through them all he pushed with studied roughness, answering with a laugh or

a joke the objurgations heaped upon his head. When he reached the stable, he took the bridles off the horses and called to the ostler loudly to bring him some oats. The ostler hurried up to help him, and Charles, as his way was, at once began to talk. The ostler, for his part, was a pleasant fellow and found the dark-faced groom a merry lad.

“ ‘Tisn’t often one sees in these parts a man so dark as you be,” he observed with kindly candour; “ I can’t help thinking that I’ve seen your face before.”

Charles started, but faced his companion boldly. “ May-be,” he answered; have you always lived round here?”

“ Oh no. I’ve not been here above a twelvemonth. I used to be in Exeter—I was ostler at the Angel there.”

“ I know,” said Charles, “ close to the house of Mr. Potter, the merchant.”

“ To be sure! Do you know him?”

Charles had lodged there in Exeter during the war. “ I should think I did,” he answered readily. “ I was in the stables there; but it’s years ago.”

“ So it is,” said the ostler. “ You must have been quite a youngster, and I’ve had time to grow a crop of grey hairs since. I thought I knew you. You’ve not changed your complexion.”

“ No,” said the King drily; “ I sometimes wish I could.”

The ostler laughed as if it were the best joke in the world. “ Well, we must drink a pot of beer on that,” he said, “ for old acquaintance’ sake.”

“ I’ll join you then,” said a trooper, taking part in the talk.

“ Trust the army for that,” said Charles with a laugh. “ But my master, friends, has got a devil of a temper, and I must serve his dinner before I get a drop of liquor for myself.”

“Are you staying at all?” asked the ostler.

“Not now, worse luck! We’re off to London. But we’ll be down here again, I dare say, in a week or two, and I sha’n’t forget that that pot of beer is due.”

“Oh, there’s no time like the present,” said the trooper. “I’ve a thirst like a gridiron inside me. This yard’s as hot as ——”

“Your future, my friend,” laughed Charles, “or my master’s temper. There he is calling me again. See to the horses, will you, ostler? I shall soon be down again.”

Colonel Wyndham, in fact, consumed by anxiety had followed to the stable-yard, and Charles seized the occasion to escape from his new companions, and to join his fellow-travellers above.

“It’s all too risky, too fearfully risky,” the Colonel protested, when he heard of the King’s recognition in the yard. “You must not expose yourself so freely, sir. We’ll stay here till Wilmot joins us, and then be off at once.”

From the window of their room they could command the street below them, and early in the afternoon, when they had dined and rested, they saw to their relief Lord Wilmot with Johnny, Hugh and Peters riding up the street. Wilmot caught sight of them watching at the window, and deliberately rode past and put up at another inn, whence, keeping Johnny with him, he despatched Hugh and Peters to the party at the George. He had seen Ellesdon, it appeared, and had informed him of Limbry’s failure to appear, and Hugh was able to explain to the others how that failure had come about. Ellesdon, infinitely distressed and disappointed, had with difficulty been prevented from accompanying them to Bridport, and had sent to the King an offer to find immediately another skipper or another ship, if he would still allow him to carry out his plan. But

Charles was disinclined to risk another failure. Colonel Wyndham strongly urged him not to return to Charmouth or to Lyme. And it was decided to send Peters back with a refusal of Ellesdon's offer, and to leave Bridport directly on their way home to Trent.

Accordingly, while Hugh returned to Wilmot, the others got their horses—the friendly ostler speeding them on their way—and rode off smartly along the Dorchester road. Within a mile or two they were joined by Wilmot, Hugh and Johnny, and turning to the left down a narrow lane, in the direction of Yeovil, they all set their faces to the North.

Meanwhile suspicion was following in their trail. Close by the Queen's Arms at Charmouth there stood an ugly chapel, newly built, the minister of which, in the suspension of the rector, was the only licensed preacher in the village and a zealous supporter of the new order of things. To him soon after the King's departure, the jealous ostler went off to communicate his doubts. He found him at family prayers, and had to kick his heels in impatience till prayers were over and the minister had breakfasted well. Then he was at last allowed to tell his story, and had no reason to complain of the interest which it roused.

The minister asked him a multitude of questions, chiefly relating to the appearance of the groom, heaped reproaches on him for not coming to him before, hurried him off to Hammet, the smith, to make sure of the tale about the horseshoes, and then marched him back to the inn and called the landlady loudly to the door.

“How now, Margaret,” he began with facetious severity. “So I hear you are a maid of honour now!”

“What mean you, Mr. Parson?” asked Mrs. Wade shortly. She had small respect for the ex-weaver now

turned preacher, whose doctrines she abominated, and with whose private history she was quite at home.

“Why, they tell me that Charles Stuart lay at your house last night——”

“It is false,” said Mrs. Wade abruptly. And immediately a hundred little doubts assailed her, and she began to wonder if it could possibly be true.

“Oh yes, he did, disguised as a groom; there’s no doubt of it! And what’s more, he kissed you on his departure. So you can’t but be a maid of honour now!”

“Stuff and nonsense!” cried the landlady, losing her temper, more perhaps at the private than at the public charge. “And who are you to go prying into my behaviour, bringing trouble on my house and on my people, and ruining my trade and my good name!”

“Keep your temper, Margaret, keep your temper! It’ll be the worse for you if this gets about.”

“Then keep your charges to yourself, I say, Mr. Parson, and don’t go flinging your nasty jokes at me! Charles Stuart indeed, as a groom in my stables, with Captain Macy’s troopers all over the yard last night! Can any one in their senses listen to such nonsense? And if it were”—here Mrs. Wade cast logic and prudence to the winds—“I’d be proud to have him here! And if the King had kissed me, I’d think the better of my lips for all the days of my life! And so, Mr. Parson, just get out of my house and be quick about it, or I’ll call those that shall kick you away from here!” And slamming the door in the face of the minister, Mrs. Wade retreated, flushed but victorious, up-stairs.

But the minister and the ostler had no intention of abandoning the clue. Off they hurried to the nearest Justice of the Peace—dragging the blacksmith along with them—and

endeavoured to persuade him to issue warrants and to raise the county in pursuit of the King. But Mr. Butler, the Justice, a dry man, with a sense of humour and a large measure of contempt for the minister and the tale he brought, leaned back in his chair and mocked them with merciless unbelief.

“Now just see what it all comes to,” he remarked when he had listened to their story and cross-examined them all. “You, ostler, have seen a dark young man whom somebody called Erle and somebody else called Jackson, hobnobbing with Captain Macy’s soldiers, and acting as groom to a party who spent a night at Charmouth Inn. On that evidence you expect me to believe that one of the party was Charles Stuart, and you haven’t made up your own mind which. You, blacksmith, have seen a horse which you say was shod in three counties, and you expect me to believe that you can tell me where each shoe was put on, and even, apparently, who rode him, merely by looking at his hoofs! And you, Mr. Parson, because a woman tells you in a temper that she’d be proud if her lips were kissed by a King—and what woman wouldn’t, I should like to know?—you, Mr. Parson, think yourself entitled to bring me this cock-and-bull story, and imagine that you’ll make a fool of me as easily as these two rascals have made a fool of you! Upon my word, sir,” and he banged the table, “I will thank you not to intrude on me in future, unless you have some better reason than this.”

The deputation retired, crestfallen, the minister wrathfully pompous and the blacksmith abashed. But the ostler was not to be so easily persuaded that his convictions were groundless and his fears absurd. It is curious how completely the idea that the King was in the neighbourhood had taken possession of the man’s mind; for he had nothing but the vaguest suspicions to build on and he still hankered

after the notion, which his companions rejected, that Miss Coningsby might be the King in disguise. And yet, vague as he was, the man clung obstinately to his fixed impression that the party which had visited the inn during the night were somehow or other connected with the King.

Guided by this instinct, the ostler, when his companions failed him, got a horse and galloped off full-tilt to Lyme, hoping to find in Captain Macy a more sympathetic response. He found the Captain in his quarters, with M. Latour seated at his side, and with Tom Trenchard erect before him reporting the results of his patrol.

“So in fact you found nothing, Mr. Trenchard,” Macy was saying. “I mean, nothing to rouse your suspicion?”

“Nothing at all, sir. The inns of course were full; I didn’t search them; but there were no suspicious loiterers and no mysterious parties on the road.”

“You see, Monsieur,” said Macy, turning to Latour. The Frenchman had evidently been confiding his doubts to the Captain.

“Did you see no one at Charmouth, I mean, no travellers of a better class?”

“Well, I met Johnny Erle there —”

“Ah!” said Latour suddenly, and his eyes flashed brightly. “And you call that nothing! You are sure it was Erle, and no one else?”

“Of course I am; I’ve known him for years; I was at school with him. He was staying at Charmouth in Colonel Wyndham’s company.”

“Ah,” said the Frenchman again, “in Colonel Wyndham’s company!”

“He was perfectly open about it.”

“No doubt. But did he explain what he was doing there?”

“Not exactly,” said Tom; “why should he?” And at that moment, following close on the heels of the Captain’s servant, the ostler of the Queen’s Arms Inn at Charmouth made his way into the room.

In a very few moments the ostler’s tale was told. Macy listened, keen but doubtful, Tom with obvious incredulity, Latour with an excitement ill-repressed.

“The dark-faced groom—tell us about him,” he broke in sharply. “That’s the point, man. Who was the dark-faced groom?”

“They called him William Jackson, when they left,” said the ostler readily; “but he was something else in the stable. You were there, sir”—he turned to Trenchard—“you came in and spoke to him. That’s what made me think at first he was all right.”

“I spoke to Johnny Erle there. I saw no groom,” Tom answered sulkily.

Latour leaned forward. “Tell us, ostler; was the man whom Mr. Trenchard spoke to—the dark-faced lad whom he called Erle in the stable-yard—the same man who acted as groom this morning, and whom they called Jackson, when they rode away?”

“Yes, sir; that’s it; that’s what puzzled me.”

“You’re certain, absolutely certain?”

“I’d take my oath to it on a Bible.”

Latour leaped to his feet. “That was the King!” he almost shouted. “Take my word for it, Captain Macy. I know him, and he’s the living image of young Erle.”

“But I tell you I’m sure it was Erle,” said Trenchard stubbornly.

Latour turned on him, out of patience. “Fool!” he said. “If it was Erle, why should his own friends call him Jackson? Why should he be riding with them got up as a

groom in disguise? As I live, Captain Macy, Charles Stuart slept last night in Charmouth, and if you mean to catch him, there's not a moment to be lost."

But the Captain had leaped to the same conclusion and was already at the door. In a very short time he had issued his orders. In a wonderfully short time his troopers were ready to start. It was long past midday, when the ostler had reached the Captain's quarters; but the afternoon found Macy and a strong detachment galloping hard along the Bridport road.

At Bridport the Captain made sharp inquiries—"the soldiers everywhere about that time," as Ellesdon in his story pathetically says, "being proudly inquisitive into the names, qualities, affairs and businesses of strangers"—and ere long he came upon the traces of the party which had dined and rested at the George. Stopping only to make sure that the dark-faced groom in grey was with them, and to ascertain in which direction they had gone, the soldiers started again at a hot pace in pursuit. But so hurried were they, that they passed without thought or noticed the narrow lane down which the King had turned, and galloped away towards Dorchester in chase of the prey they were leaving behind.

Meanwhile, unconscious of their danger, Charles and his little party rode on towards the North. Wearied with their long ride, their restless night, their anxiety and disappointment, they began, as the afternoon wore on, to feel the effects of their fatigue; and presently, on reaching a small village, with a pleasant little inn set hospitably beside a shady green, the King insisted on a halt, and sent in Hugh and Johnny to ask for a tankard of beer and to spy out the land. The response exceeded their expectations. In a few minutes the landlord came out of the house, and immedi-

ately hailed the Colonel as an old acquaintance. He was recognized by Wyndham as a certain Rice Jones, a firm friend of the King's party, who was well known to have served and suffered for the Royal cause.

"Why, Jones," said the Colonel, drawing aside to speak to him, "I had no idea that you had settled down here. What's the place called?"

"Broad Windsor, sir; I took this house about a year ago. I shall be delighted if I can do anything for you."

"Well, the fact is, Jones, we want a place to spend the night in. But we must keep quiet, out of sight of strangers and of troops."

"You couldn't find a quieter village in the county, sir, than this, as I know to my cost in winter."

"That's the thing for us then. You see, I'm on parole still, and not supposed to travel more than five miles away from home." These were the regulations then in force for Royalists living under surveillance as Colonel Wyndham did.

"I understand, sir; no names shall be mentioned. But, begging your pardon, Colonel, isn't that Colonel Reymes of Wadden with you now?"

Now Colonel Wyndham had a brother-in-law of that name, also a well-known Royalist under surveillance, who resembled Wilmot in appearance quite enough to account for the mistake. As the innkeeper spoke, he noted the suggestion in his mind.

"Well, well," he answered, "we will name no names at present. But we'll stay, if you can give us supper and quiet rooms for the night."

"I'll give you the top rooms, sir, if you'll put up with them. They're bare and poorly furnished. But they are as private as any rooms can be."

Colonel Wyndham went to confer with the others. "You'd better be Reymes, I think," he said to Wilmot, "if you don't mind changing again."

"Not a bit; the more names the merrier," said Wilmot; "and Reymes is a better name than Morton any day."

"Your Majesty approves of staying here then?"

"Yes; I approve of anything which will give us a good night's rest."

Very thankfully the party dismounted and made their way into the inn. The rooms certainly were not much to look at, being close to the roof and low in the ceiling. Charles insisted that Miss Coningsby should take the best.

"But I refuse, sir," the lady protested.

"Then, Madam, I shall be forced to command."

But the sight of a bed and the sense of safety were more than enough to make up for shortcomings, and the gaiety of their host, and the meal he set before them, revived in a measure the weary spirits of the guests. The rest, the soft air of the evening, the peace of the little place, combined to soothe them. Very soon after supper, Miss Coningsby pleaded sleepiness and withdrew.

"I fear it's a tiring thing, an elopement," said Lord Wilmot with a smile, as he bade her good-night.

"Oh! It's the failure of the elopement which has depressed me," Julia answered, smiling too. She passed on to the Colonel. "And then of course I feel acutely the disapproval of my friends."

Charles and Wilmot soon afterwards made their way upstairs and quickly fell asleep. Hugh and Johnny had a room below the others, and for a time the Colonel sat discussing plans with them.

"We shall have to make all our plans again," he told them. "It wouldn't be safe to return to Lyme. Lord

Wilmot has friends in Hampshire and in Sussex, and I think our next attempt to find a ship must be down there."

"And what will you do with the King meanwhile?" asked Hugh.

"Keep him at Trent, if he'll stay there. We shall hardly find a safer place. I don't like this running about the country, courting danger in fairs and inns."

"Nor I! It's a marvel that we've escaped so well," said John. "When I think of Tom Trenchard last night at Charmouth, and of the ostler at the George this afternoon, my heart's in my mouth every moment."

"Then I propose," said Hugh yawning, "that you allow it to stay there, and to keep your tongue quiet for a while. I'm sorry to be unsociable, father, but I'm dead sleepy to-night."

"On that ground only," said John, "I pass over your remarks."

The Colonel laughed, and rose to leave. "Hugh's right," he said, "though his manners are graceless; and I shan't be sorry to lie down. If you want me, boys, my room's above this, the last door on the left, up-stairs."

So, on uneasy mattresses, too tired to cavil, the two young men at last settled for the night, promising themselves fondly an uninterrupted sleep. For an hour or two, indeed, they enjoyed it, as deep and dreamless as their souls desired. But then the strange chapter of accidents which dogged the wandering footsteps of the King, intervened once more, to disturb their rest and disarrange their schemes. Of the two Johnny was the lighter sleeper, and presently there came into his sleep a dim sound of horses stamping, of bits and bridles jingling, of men calling and doors creaking in the house—a sound which, beginning in confused, grotesque suggestions, gradually took form and

shape, penetrated with a cold sense of reality to his brain at last, and brought him, awake and listening, to his feet.

Yes, there could be no mistake. The sounds were real. He sprang to the window and threw the curtain back.

The moon was shining softly. Rough voices were rising from below. With a sinking heart Johnny peered out into the moonlight. A party of some forty troopers was dismounting at the door.

CHAPTER X

THE RISKS OF PERSONATION

HUGH WYNDHAM was walking in perplexity along the land of dreams. Behind him there followed, unceasing, the sound of a galloping horse. In front there stretched a veil of darkness across a misty and impenetrable sea, through which a voice seemed ever to be hailing a vessel which would not come. Above and around him were glimpses of confused, incongruous things, of crowded streets and empty moorlands, of narrow parlours and wide stable-yards, of soldiers marching, ostlers shouting, fat innkeepers smiling and rubbing their fat hands, and of seamen running wildly down precipitous places pursued by phantom threats from phantom wives. But through all the bewildering changes one face—one dark face—grew ever more distinct; one voice, a very well-known one, rang clearer and clearer in his ears; until that face and voice displaced all others, and he awoke to find Johnny whispering at his side.

“Get up, Hugh; quietly; there are soldiers at the door.”

“ Soldiers, soldiers,” muttered Hugh sleepily. And then he sprang to his feet, awake.

“ It may be only a passing troop,” said Johnny. “ But if you’ll go and tell your father, I’ll slip down-stairs and find out what I can.”

It was dark outside in the passages, but the two boys found their way. Below, at the door of the tap-room Johnny ran into the landlord’s arms.

"I was coming, sir," he said, "to warn Colonel Wyndham."

"All right," said John; "I've sent word to him. Where are the soldiers from?"

"From Dorchester. They want quarters for the night. But I shan't let them up; you may be sure of that, sir. We'll put some of them in the cottages round."

"Then they're not in pursuit of any one?"

"Oh, no, sir. But they say that in Dorchester there are troops out in pursuit of the King."

"The King! In Dorchester! What nonsense!" said John boldly. Voices calling the landlord loudly came through the doorway, as he spoke.

"I must go back, sir, or they'll be wondering where I've gone."

"All right! I'll stay here, landlord, and pick up any news I can."

The soldiers were pouring into the inn and crowding round the doorway, and the bustle and confusion steadily increased. A large party of them called for beer and stood about the tap-room, drinking and talking and discussing the latest news. Johnny's heart sank as he listened. There could be no mistaking the topic of the hour.

"I tell you," said a long-faced veteran, scarred with service and bronzed by the sun, "there's no doubt at all about it. Charles Stuart was in Bridport to-day. I had it from Macy's Corporal in Dorchester. They hadn't yet caught him, but they were hot upon his trail."

"It was only by the skin of his teeth that he got away from Bridport," said another.

"He can't escape now. The alarm's all over the county by this time," said a third.

"A thousand pounds, my lads," added a genial voice from the depths of a tankard, "a thousand pounds for the man who takes him," and he slapped his pocket to emphasize the thought.

"Would you know him if you saw him, Josh?" asked a mocking spirit from the doorway.

"Trust me. I've got the description by heart. Six feet in his boots —"

"Five feet, ten," a bystander corrected.

"Six feet in his boots, I say, black hair and eyes —"

"Deep-brown, Josh!"

"Black as an inky raven! Big nose and bushy eyebrows. Square shoulders and a merry look. Dressed in a —"

"Crown on his head and sceptre in his arm-pit," interposed the scoffer by the door again.

"The Lord deliver me from your foolishness, Job Lambert," said the chief speaker with a devout emphasis that delighted his companions. "He is dressed in a grey cloth cloak and breeches, like the holiday suit of a farmer's son, and he rides with a party of Malignants acting as their groom."

Johnny's grave face grew graver as he listened to this precise description of the King, and a thoughtful look came into his eyes.

"Where do they think he is?" asked a trooper.

"He may be anywhere, anywhere," answered the principal speaker comprehensively. "Some say he's gone through Dorchester on the road to London. Some say he's hiding near. Some think he'll work back to the coast again near Lyme or Bridport, to find a ship to take him out to sea."

"He'll have a job to find one," laughed the company.

"And you shall have a worse job to find him," Johnny muttered between his teeth, as, filled with a new idea, he turned and ran noiselessly up-stairs.

Colonel Wyndham was coming down to join him, and Johnny quickly related what he had heard below.

"Then we've been traced," said Wyndham.

"Yes, and pursued as far as Dorchester. But they don't seem to suspect that we've turned off here."

"We must get back to Trent as soon as possible. And the King must change his clothes."

"Yes, with me," said Johnny promptly. "And he'd better take my name as well."

The Colonel nodded. "Yes; he might. But we can't move till these fellows have gone."

"No," said Johnny, "but I think we could draw them off the scent." And he then proceeded to unfold his plan.

An hour later the troopers had all found a lodging. The horses were stabled and the riders were billeted either on the inn premises or in farms and cottages round. The village was falling asleep again after its unwonted excitement; and only two talkative troopers, who had out-stayed their sleepier comrades, still hung about the tavern door. One of them was the genial veteran known as Josh, or Joshua, whose powers of conversation were held in high esteem, and who enjoyed among his companions an authority which was founded on superior education, coupled with a good temper and a long experience of war.

"Well, it's about time to turn in," he was saying, when his attention was arrested by the sound of horse's hoofs.

"There's some one riding late," he added. "No; there's two of them"—as the sound came nearer—"coming from over Dorchester way."

"Orders for us, Josh, eh?" asked his comrade.

"I hope not. The only order I want now is bed. They're coming this way though ;"—he waited ;—"can you see them, Reuben ? Ah, there they are !"

Dimly through the night the riders came. They were trotting hard at first, but their pace slackened as they entered the village, and near the inn they fell into a walk. Then, just within sight of the soldiers, they halted, and seemed to confer.

The moonlight fell conveniently on them, as they stayed there talking in the road. Oddly enough they had stopped in a clear space, where no shadows obscured them, and where their figures stood out distinctly against the whiteness of the road. After a short pause they began walking their horses towards the inn.

"They're young fellows," said Josh, observing them, "and gentry ; at least one of them is, the other's a groom. Reuben, quick !" his voice rose in sudden excitement—"look at that chap behind, look closely ! Do you see his grey cloak —"

"And his black face ! Yes ! Josh, Josh !"

The trooper's voice rose to a cry and he started forward, a sudden animation in his eyes ; but his leader laid a restraining hand upon his arm. "Steady, my lad," he said ; "be careful. This is a big business. We don't let that dark chap pass without knowing who he is. If he bolts, you must rouse the others. But if we can, we'll manage it alone !"

The troopers advanced to the edge of the road as the riders drew nearer. The foremost horseman pushed his horse on. The groom in grey, a dark and swarthy fellow, hung shyly and becomingly behind.

"Black hair, big nose and bushy eyebrows," muttered Joshua, the trooper, stepping out on to the road.

“Good-night, friend,” said the first horseman pleasantly. “Can you tell me the name of this village?”

“Broad Windsor, sir, at present occupied by troops.”

“Troops!” said the horseman with a start. He was a big young fellow, dressed like a gentleman, and carrying an open face. “To be sure! Well, it’s all the safer. Then there’s no room for travellers here to-night?”

“It all depends who they are, and where they hail from.”

“Oh, we’re from the country,” said the horseman vaguely, “going South. Is this the Bridport road?”

“You’ll give me your name, sir?” The troopers were well in the centre of the roadway and blocking the passage now.

“My name? Oh, yes, if you like; it’s Wyndham.”

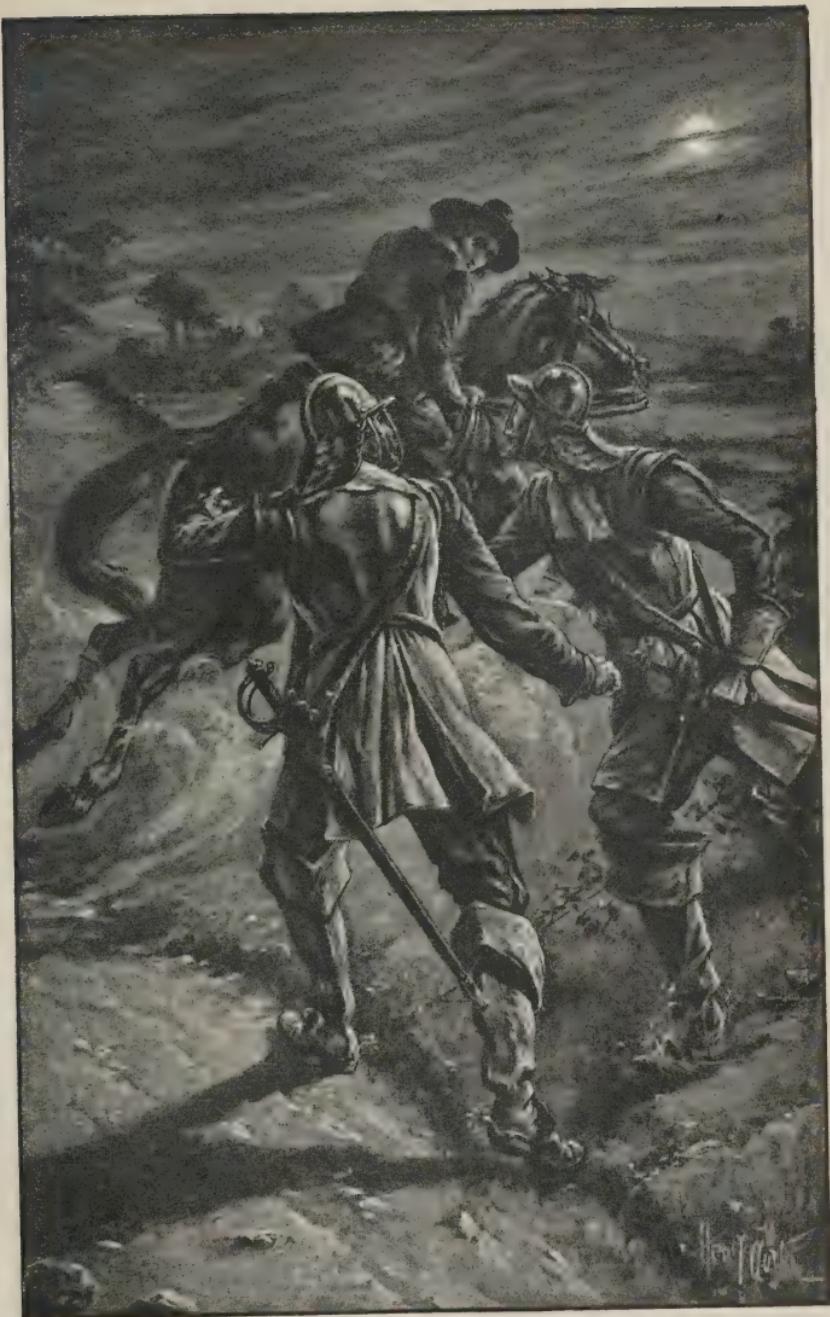
“And your servant’s?” persisted Josh.

The horseman glanced over his shoulder. “That fellow’s name?” he said rather oddly. “No. Why should I? Find it out for yourselves.”

As he spoke, the troopers started forward. “Go for the dark chap,” whispered Josh. And without waiting for the words, they bolted past the leading horseman and made a dash at the bridle of the groom.

But the dark-faced lad in grey was not taken by surprise. As the soldiers sprang towards him, his horse, at a touch of the spur, leaped forward and was off over the green, just missing by a hair’s breadth Reuben’s extended hand. With a rousing cry, very surprising in a man who presumably wished to avoid pursuit, his friend started after him, only swinging round in his saddle to fling a taunt at the troopers as he disappeared.

“Try again, my lads! Bring your army to catch us,” he shouted in exultant tones. And off he clattered along the road to Bridport with a halloo which might have wakened up the dead.



"His horse leaped forward and was off"

It did awaken many of the sleeping troopers, and half a dozen startled faces appeared in the doorway of the inn. In an instant Reuben was beside them, pouring out an extraordinary tale, and Josh was already making for the stable shouting out at the top of his great voice: "Help, help! Charles Stuart's escaping! To horse and after him! To horse! To horse!"

In a surprisingly short time the men were all up and the village was astir. Orders were issued. A bugle rang out. Josh, followed by a handful of troopers, was galloping bare-backed after the fugitives into the night, and within half-an-hour all the little force had followed him, and Broad Windsor was left to wonder and at last to sleep.

Only, up-stairs at a garret window, Colonel Wyndham and Lord Wilmot watched the commotion with a grim smile of enjoyment on their lips. Then, when all was still again, they woke the sleeping King.

"If Your Majesty is rested now, we will press on," said Wyndham.

Charles yawned. "If we must, we must," he said ruefully. "But I should like to sleep here for a month."

They told him of the troopers' visit in the night.

"And I slept through all that, while you were watching! I'm ashamed of myself." He rose quickly. "Where are my clothes?"

"We have taken the liberty of stealing them, sir," said Wilmot. "But we have left you others in exchange. You are now Mr. Johnny Erle, and you are travelling, with Colonel Wyndham, Colonel Reymes and Miss Coningsby, to Trent."

"And where is Mr. Erle?"

"Riding in your clothes to Bridport, sir."

"But they may take him for me!"

“ He hopes, sir, that they will.”

Charles' eyes glistened. “ How am I to thank you all ? ” he said with feeling. “ It is courage and loyalty like that which give me strength to persevere.”

And so, before the dawn was on them, the little party started, unobserved, for Trent.

Meanwhile into the darkness with high hopes Hugh and Johnny rode. Their ruse had succeeded to perfection. Stealing out of the house at the back, with the landlord's connivance, they had secured their horses, had made a detour through the woods, and then had reappeared at the proper moment to rouse the suspicions of the troopers at the inn.

“ We'll give them a ride for it, Johnny, and keep them out of their beds to-night,” said Hugh, as the two rejoined each other at a short distance along the Bridport road.

“ All right ! Go easy then, till they catch sight of us ; and as soon as they see us, we'll strike across country to the right.”

It was a reckless expedition in the moonlight, and they undertook it at the peril of their necks. But as their pursuers came into sight, they spurred their horses forward, and away into the night they went. Happily the horses could be trusted, and their seat in their saddles was secure. Happily, too, it was an open country, with many a firm track and grassy common, and even in the woodlands there were pathways not too full of pitfalls for the feet. In spite of the baffling shadows, in spite of the over-arching trees, in spite of the gloom that enwrapped them whenever a cloud sailed across the moon, on they went, over heather and bracken, sandy hillock and gravelly lane, up slopes where the stars beckoned at them, down into hollows where the heavens were hid, through pools where the rushes bowed

to them like courtiers surprised from the brink, through brooks where the waters rushed at them as light and as merry as they. Before them the night-birds flew, startled, and the huddled sheep scattered in flight. Behind them came a noise of angry voices borne on the wind that rose before the dawn. When at last the light broke, and the boys halted on a hilltop, to look back on the wild race which they had run, they had flung off every trace of their pursuers, and were not sorry to dismount awhile and rest.

“Hugh,” said John, “at the first farmhouse we come to, we have breakfast. After that we’ll find out which way Bridport lies.”

It was high morning when, with a stiffness exceeding most other sensations, but with a pride surpassing all, they were seen descending a track which ran direct into Bridport from the hills. And then, though their faces were still obstinately gay, their limbs were very weary, and they rode like jaded men.

Ellesdon had been overwhelmed with self-reproach and sorrow after his interview with Lord Wilmot on the previous day. His first step had been to go in search of Limbry, on whom he had poured out the full vials of his wrath. His next, when he realized that nothing could move the old seaman to repeat his offer, and that there was no alternative but to abandon that design, had been to mount his horse and ride off towards Charmouth, to make sure of the safety of the King. After visiting the Queen’s Arms, hearing the landlady’s story, and congratulating her on the way in which she had rejected so unlikely and absurd a tale, he had gone on to Pilsdon House, a few miles off, and had made enquiries of Robert Wyndham and Sir Hugh, his father, who of course could tell him nothing of the doings of their friends from Trent. From there he had returned to Charmouth and had

called on Mr. Butler, the Justice, who belonged of course to the party in power, but whom Ellesdon and many other Royalists counted as a friend.

Mr. Butler was still very angry with the minister who had brought him so ridiculous a story earlier in the day. "The truth of it is, Ellesdon," he said, "I, as you know, am no lover of prelatists or princes; but these fanatics are sometimes past bearing, when they run away with an idea. They've got Charles Stuart on the brain at this moment, and are quite capable of shooting any lad with a dark skin and black eyebrows at sight."

He insisted that Ellesdon should spend the night with him. "You want to get to Bridport? Well, I'm due there to-morrow. But it's too dark to ride over this evening, and a lonely old fellow like me doesn't readily part with a guest. We'll start as early as you like in the morning. Come, now, your business can't be so pressing. If you refuse, I shall think you want to be off and hunting Prince Charles for yourself."

So it fell out that Ellesdon spent that night away from home, and thus missed Peters with his budget of news. So it fell out also that, at an early hour next morning, Ellesdon found himself riding into Bridport at Mr. Butler's side, and presently involved, as something more than a spectator, in a startling encounter which occupied the street.

A party of troopers was drawn up in close rank across the road, surrounded by a crowd of towns-people, and enclosing a space which formed the theatre of a curious little scene. In the centre of this space were Captain Macy—summoned from Dorchester in the small hours of the morning—Tom Trenchard, M. Latour, the Frenchman, and the leader of the contingent who had poured out of Broad Windsor helter-skelter in the night. Facing them, tired, imprisoned, but

undaunted, were Hugh Wyndham—there was no mistaking his back—and a grey-coated figure beside him whom Ellesdon recognized—no, refused to recognize—with a sudden horror growing in his eyes. Who was it—the dark head, the square shoulders, the plain drab suit, the bearing of a noble and the guise of a serving-man? Could it be Johnny? No. It was the King's dress, his hat, his very posture, as he had last seen him on his way to Charmouth only two nights before. And this muster of soldiers, this crowd—what else could it mean? His heart sank, as he watched it, and his face blanched with a fear that he could not control.

“Whom have they got there, Ellesdon?” asked Mr. Butler.

“God knows, sir,” said Ellesdon, and his voice sounded husky and hard.

“Nothing wrong with you, is there?” said Mr. Butler, glancing at his companion.

“No, nothing,” answered Ellesdon quickly, making an effort to control himself.

As he spoke, they touched the outskirts of the crowd, and at the same moment it parted, and Captain Macy moved through it, issuing his orders in stentorian tones.

“Bring them along to the George, and guard them closely. Corporal Dawson, take my compliments to the Mayor and ask him to come to the George immediately with another Justice, on a matter of the first importance to the State. Prisoners in front! Close in there about them!” And at the order the troops fell into line.

Mr. Butler pushed his horse forward. “Captain Macy,” he began, “if you want a Justice of the Peace, I'm at your service——”

But he got no further. The prisoners had turned towards

him, and the crowd between had moved aside, disclosing for the first time clearly, the features of the two young men. And as that happened, Ellesdon's face broke suddenly into a radiant smile, and his voice rang out across the street.

"Johnny, Johnny!" he shouted, and his cousin's voice answered cheerily over the heads of his guards.

"All right, Will. Come with us."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Butler, bewildered.

"Only my cousin, John Erle, whom they've arrested." Ellesdon's face was glowing and ruddy again.

"'Pon my soul, you seem delighted about it," said Mr. Butler drily. But Ellesdon only answered him with an exultant laugh.

To the George Inn, following the troopers, the whole party repaired. Captain Macy called Mr. Butler to him and talked to him in low tones, as they rode along. Ellesdon dropped behind and followed them contentedly. It was Johnny—that was all he cared about—Johnny dressed, not without some good reason, in the King's discarded clothes! Outside the George, Ellesdon had to wait, while the others entered, in company with an ever-growing crowd, for the excitement in the town was rapidly spreading, and all sorts of startling rumours were afoot. Presently the Mayor came hurrying up, and was of course admitted, while Ellesdon still waited in the street. Then a couple of portly gentlemen, followed by servants, rode up, dismounted quickly, and were ushered in. Then at last, in reply to a note sent in to Mr. Butler, an order came out for Ellesdon's admission too.

He found a small Court assembled in the long room of the inn. Captain Macy stood by the Mayor who sat at a table, flanked by Mr. Butler and two other Justices, the portly gentlemen who had ridden up a few minutes before.

In front of them stood Hugh and Johnny closely guarded, and not far off the landlord, the ostler, a chambermaid, Tom Trenchard and M. Latour, a couple of clerks busy writing, half-a-dozen of the troopers from Broad Windsor, and as many of Captain Macy's men. The Captain was examining the ostler sharply as Ellesdon came in.

"You say you knew him by sight? You had seen him before?"

"Yes, I was sure of it. And he said so himself."

"Where was it?"

"Well"—the man scratched his head—"I think he said it was at Mr. Potter's, at Exeter, wasn't it?" He turned to Johnny to confirm his words.

"Answer me, sir. Don't talk to the prisoner," thundered the Captain in reply.

"Let us hear the man's story, Captain," said Mr. Butler calmly. "When was it, ostler, that you saw him before, do you say?"

"May be five or six years ago, sir. I was living in Exeter, then."

"He would be only a boy at that time?"

"Aye, aye, sir; he was; just a stripling."

"Was Prince Charles," asked the Captain impressively, "in Exeter then?"

The man looked up and a light broke over his face. "To be sure, sir," he answered. "I forgot that. The Prince was stopping at Mr. Potter's too. And"—he paused and stared hard at Johnny—"why, he was a dark young fellow—that's where I saw him—but it can't be—yet, I do believe it is"—his voice rose in excitement and he leaned forward, gazing at Johnny with wonder in his eyes.

"You believe it is the Prince, in fact?" said Macy quickly, while the whole room listened intent.

The man paused again. "Upon my soul, sir," he said gravely, "I believe it is."

A murmur of excitement ran through the assembly, and Macy stepped up to Johnny with a smile of triumph on his lips.

"Does Your Highness still think that it can serve any purpose to keep up this masquerade?"

But in reply Johnny threw back his head and laughed—laughed so freely, so joyously, so unrestrainedly, that all the bystanders stared at him amazed, and not a few of them, catching the infection, laughed as well. The more the Captain frowned, the more the Justices whispered and wondered, the more uncontrollably Johnny's laugh rang out, again and again, in deep rich peals of merriment, which no one, hearing them, could think were forced or feigned. At last the Mayor interposed.

"Come, come, sir," he said with a feeble assumption of sternness, and then stopped, not quite knowing how to proceed.

"Your Worship," said Johnny, "I will come anywhere with pleasure, and I have come here to dissipate a ridiculous delusion. I give you my word as a gentleman that I am neither Prince nor King."

"There's no King in England," said the Mayor with an imposing air.

"Tell us clearly who you are then," Mr. Butler broke in.

"I am John Erle, of Lowfields in Virginia, living now with my uncle, Canon Erle, in Salisbury, as any one can ascertain."

"You don't deny that you were here yesterday in suspicious company," Macy interrupted hotly.

"I deny nothing, except that my company was suspicious. It was nothing of the sort. I have a perfect

right to ride to Charmouth and to Bridport, and to put up at an inn. I can't help it, if ostlers invent ridiculous stories, and the soldiers of the Commonwealth are easily misled."

"You'll have to disprove those stories," said Macy roughly.

"What nonsense!" said John boldly. "If you want to arrest me, you'll have to prove your ridiculous case."

"There must be no disrespect to the Court," the Mayor began weakly.

"There is none, sir," said John; "but there is no case against me. It's no crime, though it may be a misfortune, to have a dark face and to resemble a King."

"Ah!" A murmur again ran through the room.

"I've heard of the resemblance; I suppose there is some, as it's a standing joke now with my friends. And I admit, I took advantage of it to play a prank on the troopers at Broad Windsor last night."

The Justices were listening, open-mouthed. "That was an unpardonable joke," the Mayor began, but Johnny met him with a smile.

"I know, sir. But surely, when they began to chase me, without any reason, I had a right to run away. I'm not to blame if men will take me for my betters——"

"That's all very well," said Macy, "but this impudence doesn't account for the ostler's tale."

"Oh yes, it does," said Johnny coolly. "I put him off with nonsense. Of course I guessed that he took me for the King——"

"There is no King in England, sir," cried the Mayor again.

"Of course not, Your Worship," Johnny corrected. "But then it seems hardly logical to arrest me for being a King to-day."

Even the Justices—the Mayor excepted—smiled at the sally. A hum of talk ran round the room.

“Is there any one here who can identify you, or confirm your story?” asked one of the Justices who had not spoken yet.

“There are plenty,” said John—“my old friend here, Hugh Wyndham——”

“A Malignant,” said Macy, “and under arrest himself.”

“Or my cousin, William Ellesdon of Lyme Regis,” John continued, “whom I see there. He can tell you of all my movements in the last few days.”

“Ah, Mr. Ellesdon,” said the Mayor. He knew the name.

“He’s a good witness,” added Mr. Butler.

“He’s a Malignant, too, and in the conspiracy,” said Macy surlily.

“You forget, Captain Macy,” Butler answered, “that you have yet to prove that a conspiracy exists.”

“If you don’t like these gentlemen’s opinions,” said Johnny calmly—he saw that he was winning and he was now thoroughly enjoying himself—“there’s my old school-fellow there, Tom Trenchard, now serving under Captain Macy himself. He can tell you anything you want to know.”

The Mayor turned round in astonishment to Tom. “Mr. Trenchard,” he said—“that is a name which we all honour—does Mr. Trenchard know this gentleman by name?”

All eyes were bent on Tom, as he stepped forward. “Yes, I know him,” he said bluntly. “He’s John Erle, and I’ve known him for years. I saw him last at the Charmouth Inn two nights ago.”

The last part of Tom’s little speech was aimed at Latour—Latour who only the day before had mocked him and

called him a fool for not recognizing the King in Johnny Erle, Latour on whom he was now turning the tables so completely, Latour who in spite of his warning had led Macy on this wild goose chase. Of course it had been Erle all along ; he had always known it ; and Tom threw as much scorn as possible into his voice.

But the effect of his plain statement was profound. Macy flushed with annoyance ; and there was an audible titter in the room. Mr. Butler with a quiet smile leaned forward, and pressed the question home.

“ You have no doubt at all that it was Mr. Erle whom you met at Charmouth, and who is here before us to-day ? ”

“ Not a shadow of doubt,” said Tom. “ I tell you I know him. And in every detail, dress and all, he is just as I saw him the other night.”

Again Johnny’s merry laugh rang out ; that little unconscious touch of Tom’s about the dress was perfect. This time most of the audience laughed as well.

But Macy was furious, as he saw his castle crumbling to the ground. He turned to Latour as a last resource. “ Mr. Mayor,” he cried, “ there is a gentleman here, a distinguished Frenchman, who knows the King of Scots perfectly by sight. He is prepared to swear — ”

“ Stay, Captain,” Latour interrupted in his clear, disagreeable voice. “ I am prepared to swear that the resemblance between His Highness and this gentleman is most striking — most striking. But I do not doubt for a moment that this is, as he says, Mr. Erle.”

Something like a shout greeted this declaration. The trial was ended. The Court broke up in smiles. Captain Macy, exasperated beyond measure, rode off in black dudgeon with his men. Ellesdon claimed his cousin’s company, and the Justices ordered the young men’s release. It was a light-

hearted party, though a very weary, which set out soon afterwards for Lyme. "Come home with me and sleep, one night at least," Ellesdon had pleaded. And the prospect of sleep was far too welcome for either Hugh or Johnny to refuse. As they left the inn, M. Latour suddenly appeared in the doorway, and ran up to Johnny with an outstretched hand.

"Let me congratulate you, Mr. Erle," he said genially. "It was a real pleasure to hear you and to contribute my mite to your defence."

And Johnny asked himself, as he rode away, if it was only unreasoning prejudice which made him imagine that the Frenchman's compliments had in them always something like a sneer.

CHAPTER XI

M. LATOUR PLAYS A GAME OF CHESS

M. LATOUR sat in a deep-windowed room of the old George Inn at Bridport, dreamily contemplating his finely cultivated nails. Before him on a table lay the relics of a meal. Behind him on a bureau, whose fine workmanship would in these days win the heart of a collector and handsomely plenish a dealer's purse, lay a heap of papers, letters and reports. Beyond him, and beyond the great bowed window, sounded the bustle of the street. But heedless of all, the Frenchman sat, absorbed in meditation, and the frown upon his face portended that his meditations were not of the most easy kind.

Presently he rose, and stepping to the bureau, took up a letter lying on the top of the papers there. It was written in cipher and stamped with an official seal.

"If I could trust Le Tellier," he said, "I should find it simple enough to dot his 'i's' and cross his 't's.'"

Le Tellier was then Secretary of State in Paris, the nominee and the devoted adherent of Mazarin, whom the jealousy of the Princes and the hatred of the people had forced to take refuge in a temporary exile near Cologne.

"The Cardinal," wrote the Secretary of his absent chief, "is still, as you will have heard, at Brühl, waiting on events. But I have hopes of his reappearance in France—it may be with an army behind him—before the year is done. Meanwhile no effort should be spared to promote his interests abroad, and to secure for him the support and friendship of the English Government. In England the Royal cause is

evidently hopeless. You will therefore do all you can to conciliate Cromwell and the military party, assuring them of the assistance of the Cardinal in the event of his return to power. You will inform them that his return sooner or later is beyond doubt; that his influence with the Queen-Mother is unshaken; and that even in his exile he is directing the entire foreign policy of France. Any action on your part that promotes the idea that the interests of the English Commonwealth and of the Cardinal are one, will be of value. But the responsibility will of course be your own. It might avoid difficulties if the King of Scots did not return to France. I send money for any purposes which you have in view."

"Which means," said Latour to himself, as his brows drew closer, giving an ugly aspect to his curious face, "that I, Le Tellier, who am as cunning as an attorney and as cautious as a judge, have no doubt that Mazarin will soon return to power; that meanwhile you must make friends for him wherever you can; that he intends to throw over the Stuarts decisively; and that he doesn't want King Charles in Paris appealing to the generosity of a young romantic King. So M. Latour's plan of handing over the English Prince to the Army of the Commonwealth, will fall in admirably with the Cardinal's plans. But M. Latour must act without orders and take all the risks for himself."

He rose and began pacing slowly up and down.

"On the other hand," he continued, "the idea is plainly not discouraged; the money I asked for is forthcoming; and the advantage to Monsignor the Cardinal is clear. Yes, the situation is tolerably obvious, and M. Latour's plans, I think, go on."

He sat down at the bureau, pushed back the papers, and began moving his fingers, as if he were placing chessmen

in a game. Then he suddenly looked up and glanced round the room. In a corner on a separate table was a chess-board set out with highly ornamental men. With a laugh he rose and fetched it, and sweeping the board bare, began to play a queer game by himself.

“Here,” he said, “is the black King—with a complexion ready for the purpose. We will place him there in the middle, shall we say?—yes, I think it must be so—at Trent. Then here to the right is Salisbury—we must turn our attention to Salisbury now. There are very active Royalists in Salisbury; my friend Dr. Henchman—we’ll make him a bishop; and my friend Johnny Erle—after his recent exploits we will make him a knight. My friend Johnny Erle has his wits about him, and his personal advantages are considerable for his game. Then down here at Lyme, there is Ellesdon; I don’t think Ellesdon is more than a pawn; but pawns may be made very useful; I think I must visit Ellesdon to-day. Then there is Tom, another pawn, a little too straight in his movements, and surly and stubborn and dull; I must teach Tom to move sideways, if he wants to take an enemy or to win a game. Tom—yes—Tom might go to Salisbury; Desborough will settle that. And Tom is aggrieved by my candour; I must see Tom and soothe him before he leaves. And then there is the girl; Tom won’t stay without her; that is more difficult. She should be placed at Salisbury among the Royalists too. But how in this evil world may a gentleman of fashion safely exhibit an interest in a lovely young lady of humble birth? Ah, wait! Yes, I remember; and somewhere or other I have got that lady’s address.”

He crossed to the bureau again and searched among the papers. Presently he found the one he wanted, and read it out aloud.

“‘Mrs. Hyde, of Heale House, a few miles from Salisbury, widow of the late Lawrence Hyde, a devoted Cavalier, and sister of Canon Erle.’ The very thing ! In the thick of the Royalists ! And she wants a dairymaid, of course. I heard her say so. How useful these domestic details are. I’ll suggest it to Mrs. Coventry ; Ellesdon shall support it ; and my fine Tom shall make Rose take the place. We will concentrate our energies on Salisbury, and to Trent I will see for myself.”

He sat down and wrote in an elaborate hand :

“ Will you think it a strange thing, dear Madam, if a Frenchman, who has a lively recollection of your kindness, permits himself the impertinence of mentioning to you a matter that belongs more properly to a lady’s province than a man’s ? ” So he wound up his letter of thanks to Mrs. Coventry for her hospitality a few nights before. “ But there is near here a very respectable seaman, a tenant of our friend Mr. Ellesdon, who desires to place his daughter in a household where her welfare and principles would be secure. As the girl is said to be a skilful dairymaid and has, I believe, good recommendations, it just occurred to me that she might be of service to your charming friend Mrs. Hyde. Pray forgive the officiousness of a stranger who for himself would think it good fortune to be attached to the household of any friend of yours.”

Mrs. Coventry read the note with much amusement, and tossed it over to her husband with a laugh.

“ Fancy you, John, taking the trouble to find dairymaids for your lady friends ! But I shall really write to Mr. Ellesdon. I wonder if this treasure has a lady’s recommendation at her back.”

“ H’m ! ” said Coventry ; “ I should ask the Frenchman what he knows about the girl.”

“For shame, John! He knows that Mrs. Hyde is in want of a dairymaid. She mentioned her wants in his hearing; and he has evidently ravaged the earth for one since. There’s gallantry for you! How much better they do these things in France!”

And on his part Latour had murmured to himself as he despatched his letter:

“In France we should think this peculiar. But it may pass with a people who are both dull-witted and mad.”

M. Latour had other letters to write that morning; a letter to Le Tellier, and a long report addressed to Brühl; a note, enclosing both, to a French agent in London, and finally a letter to General Desborough, the General commanding the forces of the Commonwealth in those parts, detailing his reasons for suspecting some mischievous activity on the part of the Royalists in Salisbury, and requesting that some troops, and Mr. Tom Trenchard in particular, might be put at his disposal there. M. Latour had relations with the leaders of the Commonwealth which secured attention for any such requests. Then, his correspondence finished, he sent a note over to Mr. Trenchard’s quarters, and requested the honour of a visit from that gallant officer at the inn.

Mr. Trenchard found the Frenchman waiting for him in his most genial and expansive mood; but Tom’s manner at first displayed a stiffness which spoke of a troubled conscience and a ruffled pride. M. Latour pushed a bottle towards him and pulled up his most comfortable chair.

“Before you say anything, Mr. Trenchard, do me the favour to drink a glass of wine, and to listen to the apology which I called to offer you yesterday, unhappily after you had gone out.”

"Oh," began Tom, his resentment melting; but Latour would not allow him to go on.

"I owe it to you, Mr. Trenchard, and I owe it not less to myself. It was my fault that we differed. You were right, and I was entirely wrong. I beg your pardon for my hasty words." And he held out his hand with a candour no boy could resist.

Tom was overwhelmed by this handsome treatment, and could only stammer out in reply that it was all right, that they had all been taken in, but that, after five years at Sherborne, it was hardly likely that he should have been mistaken about Johnny Erle.

"Most unlikely, most unlikely," Latour assented, and no one could have guessed that he was laughing at the young man in his sleeve. "But for all that, Trenchard, your friend's resemblance to King Charles is quite amazing, and I'm convinced that the King himself is not far off."

Tom smiled, a slow, incredulous, superior smile.

"You want to know my grounds, and I'll tell you what they are. First of all, I have reports—you see those papers—from the authorities and from agents in London and elsewhere, which to my mind prove conclusively three things; first, that King Charles is not in London; secondly, that he has not fled to the North; thirdly, that he has not yet left the country, and that the Western ports are so well guarded that he's not likely to try to leave by one of them. Besides that, I know that the Royalists are active in Salisbury, and that Colonel Wyndham, a noted Royalist, has been planning something there. I know that Colonel Wyndham and a mysterious party—one of whom bears a striking resemblance to the King—have been visiting Charmouth secretly at night. I know that a plan was on foot and a vessel

chartered to convey some unknown passengers privately to France — ”

“ That needn’t have been the Scots’ King,” said Tom ; “ there are many fugitive Royalists.” He was thinking of Robert Wyndham in the cart.

“ I agree ; it need not,” said Latour ; “ but, my friend, it might have been. The plot fails, and Colonel Wyndham’s mysterious party disappears. Add to these facts the details we heard yesterday, the story of the smith and the horseshoes, the story of the oslter at Charmouth and of the ostler here, the increasing rumour that the King is hiding in this country, the likelihood of his attempting an escape from some small Southern port. It is all surmise, I admit — ”

“ Yes, it is,” said Tom unsympathetically.

“ But surmise worth verifying until clearer clues turn up.”

“ What do you mean to do then ? ” asked Tom bluntly.

“ I mean to verify my surmises—thus I mean to keep a sharp eye on our friends at Salisbury and our friends at Trent. If the King is there, they will not rest till they get him off to sea. They may try one of the Hampshire towns, Lymington or Southampton next. There are noted Royalists down there. But if I’m not mistaken, Salisbury is the key to the situation now. I want you to go to Salisbury, Trenchard, and to keep a close watch on Mr. Johnny Erle.”

“ But how am I to get there ? ” said Tom, “ unless Macy allows it ? ”

“ Macy will allow it,” said Latour quietly. “ Macy will probably be moved to Salisbury. I have asked General Desborough to arrange for that.”

Tom opened his eyes. He was impressed at last.

“ And I have told the General that he may depend on

the discretion of a certain young officer in Captain Macy's force."

Tom blushed faintly under his skin.

"But how do you know Johnny Erle is at Salisbury?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Latour; "but I conjecture that after what has passed he won't go back at once to Trent."

"Then what do you want me to do?" Tom repeated.

The Frenchman leaned forward and spoke in low, emphatic tones.

"You will go to Salisbury and keep this young man under close observation. You will make it your business to know as far as possible everything he does and everywhere he goes. You will be as much as possible in his company, in that of Canon Erle his uncle, and in that of Dr. Henchman, the Canon's great friend. You will be ready at any moment, on receiving instructions from me, countersigned by Desborough or Macy, to use your men as I direct; and meanwhile you will act as my confidential agent and report to me constantly on all that you observe."

"I don't much care for playing the spy," said Tom slowly.

The Frenchman leaned back and gazed at him with a fine indignation on his face.

"The spy, Mr. Trenchard! God forbid I should suggest it! Is it likely that I could ask or expect *you* to play a part like that? No, no! You go upon an honourable mission, to act the part of a soldier and a diplomatist in one. You go by the desire of your commanding officer, to guard against a mischievous conspiracy, to frustrate a plot which may be full of danger to the State. For that end, before we act, we must have information. We must ascertain—as all great generals have to—what our enemies are

about. And, by the way"—Latour's tone changed to one of easy confidential friendship, as he watched the lad out of the corner of his eye—"I think it quite possible that Miss Limbry may receive the offer of a place in the household of Mrs. Hyde of Heale. It is a house which any young lady would be safe in, and within an easy ride of Salisbury, as you may know."

The boy's face glowed, and his hesitation vanished.

"Are you sure of that, Latour? How did you manage it?"

The Frenchman laughed.

"No matter. You see, I have some influence. I don't know it yet for certain, but I conjecture that it may be so. If Miss Limbry gets the offer, don't let her refuse."

"I'll see to that," said Tom with decision.

"Do; and then, if you were both in Salisbury, and you were bent on an unwise marriage still——"

"Yes, yes?" Tom was as wax now in the hands of his companion.

"There are quiet little churches in Salisbury, and there is a small remittance, my dear Trenchard, due to you. And if by any chance your skill led to the King's discovery, a thousand pounds is the reward they talk of, and it would make a nice little portion for Miss Rose."

Ten minutes later Tom had departed to his quarters, and M. Latour was pulling on his riding-boots alone. He locked up his papers, rang for a servant and ordered his horse to be brought round to the window. But before he left the room he stopped a moment by the chess-board and looked whimsically at the pieces which he had set up.

"Poor little pawn," he said, "so slow, so straight, so stubborn, and yet so easily drawn into crookedness by the old, old bribe."

Then he picked up his gloves and his whip and went slowly down the staircase, humming a gay song slightly out of tune.

“Now for a passing call at Mr. Limbry’s, and then to Lyme to see if we can break Ellesdon’s defences down !”

Ellesdon was on the quay engaged in business, which hardly distracted his melancholy thoughts. Hugh and Johnny, after passing the night at his lodging, had ridden off, the former to Trent, the latter to Salisbury, as Latour had cleverly foreseen. Peters had returned to Pilsdon, to watch over Robert Wyndham’s safety there. And Ellesdon was feeling rather flat and lonely after the excitement of the last few days, when he heard himself suddenly hailed in a foreign accent, and turning, found himself shaking hands with M. Latour.

“Upon my word, Mr. Ellesdon, in these distracting days it is a pleasure to see a friend.”

Ellesdon was hardly prepared for such cordiality, but his heart warmed in spite of himself to the stranger, who interrupted his dull meditations with such cheery geniality as this.

“To tell you the truth, Mr. Ellesdon, I was feeling so anxious, that I couldn’t resist coming over to see you. In such times honest men must not stand on ceremony. The danger is too pressing for that.”

Ellesdon stared.

“I’m afraid I don’t quite follow you.”

“Oh, you will, you will,” said the Frenchman, nodding confidentially. “But you are quite right to be cautious. Nothing is gained by wearing one’s secrets on one’s sleeve. Now, is there any place where we could talk in private? This quay, though very charming, seems to be as public as a market-place.”

“Come to my lodgings,” said Ellesdon abruptly, and without further parley he led the way.

M. Latour indulged in no further confidences till they were both seated in Ellesdon’s room. Then he dropped his lighter manner, and, fixing his eyes narrowly on Ellesdon, began to talk in serious and decisive tones.

“You are now alone, Mr. Ellesdon? Our young friend, Mr. Erle, will have returned to Salisbury, and Mr. Hugh Wyndham has no doubt gone back to Trent?”

Ellesdon was startled by the accuracy of the man’s information, but he merely nodded in reply. Latour noted with satisfaction that both his guesses were correct.

“That was a very clever performance of young Erle’s,” he continued.

“What do you mean?” asked Ellesdon, on his guard at once.

“I mean his checkmate of Captain Macy. You and I, Mr. Ellesdon, know that it wasn’t as innocent as it seemed.”

Ellesdon was growing profoundly uncomfortable. How much was this man guessing? How much did he really know?

“Mr. Erle’s resemblance to King Charles is so striking,” Latour continued, carefully watching his companion, as he spoke, “that it affords the strongest protection that the King could have; and Mr. Erle used his advantage with masterly effect.”

“I have heard of the resemblance,” said Ellesdon lamely.

“Surely you have had better opportunities than hearsay, Mr. Ellesdon, of judging if it’s true.”

With an effort Ellesdon faced his visitor and smiled.

“You are rather mysterious, M. Latour,” he answered. “Suppose you say plainly what it is you wish to know.”

Latour lay back in his chair and laughed.

“ My dear Mr. Ellesdon, your diplomatists are sometimes accused of lacking in *finesse*. But, upon my word, I think that your directness is the most baffling quality a diplomatist can have. It is only equalled by your admirable reserve. If I imitated your reserve, we should never understand each other. I will imitate your candour instead.”

“ Do,” said Ellesdon cautiously, as the Frenchman paused for a reply.

“ I am in this country,” Latour went on, “ partly on a private visit, but partly as an agent in the confidence of the Court of France. I have close relations, as you know, with many English Royalists, both in Paris and over here, and my special object is to be of service, if I can, to the Royal cause. Now I know that that cause is in danger.”

“ I am afraid that all the world knows that now.”

“ Yes, but all the world does not know what you and I know, Mr. Ellesdon”—Latour leaned suddenly over the table at which they sat, and paused effectively before he jerked out the final words—“ the fact that the King is—here !”

In spite of himself, Ellesdon started, as much at the man’s dramatic manner as at his words. Did Latour really know? Was he only guessing? Could he trust him? He resolutely held himself in. But his self-control betrayed him to his watchful foe.

“ I see from your manner, Mr. Ellesdon,” said the Frenchman suavely, “ that that news is no news to you.”

Curse the fellow’s cleverness! He had been guessing! Ellesdon summoned all his wits to guard the truth.

“ I think you should tell me, M. Latour,” he said slowly, “ what reasons you have for a statement so startling as that.”

“ With all the pleasure in the world, my dear fellow,—

Ellesdon winced at the familiarity—"if you will only be as open with me. I have private information which leads me to believe that King Charles is in hiding near at hand. I suspect that he has been in Mr. Erle's company, and that their wonderful resemblance has been used to conceal the fact. I know that you are Mr. Erle's cousin and Colonel Wyndham's friend, and that Colonel Wyndham's family are among the most staunch and intimate adherents of the Royal cause. I find you engaged in a neat little plan for shipping off two mysterious gentlemen to France, and the same night I find a mysterious gentleman arriving in the neighbourhood whose description in many small details tallies closely with the King's. As a man of sense, I can't resist the conclusion to which these inferences point. As a man of honour, I lay them before you frankly and invite your confidence as freely in exchange. As a loyal gentleman, I ask your leave to help you, and to offer my sword and my service to your King."

Latour had risen. His voice had deepened with emotion, and a fine air of dignity had come into his face. Ellesdon was shaken. His doubts and suspicions seemed unworthy in face of an avowal so generous and so frank. Besides, if Latour knew so much, the truth could hardly matter. And yet the man was a stranger, and the King's secrets were not his to tell. With an impulse more disconcerting to Latour than any cunning, he stepped up to the Frenchman and held out his hand.

"M. Latour," he said, "as one of the King's servants, I thank you for your offer. I am, I freely admit to you, devoted to his cause. But you, who value loyalty, will understand that, if I possessed the King's secrets, I could not speak of them even to the most honourable of friends."

Latour bit his lip. Was this young man with his egre-

gious candour going to foil him? His tone changed a little as he answered, and as Ellesdon noted the change his suspicions revived.

“Wouldn’t it be safer, Mr. Ellesdon, to trust a friend who knows so much?”

“I wasn’t thinking of my safety,” Ellesdon answered, “but of what I owe to other men.”

“Wouldn’t it be safer for the King to be more open with me?”

Ellesdon faced him full.

“I assume, of course, after what you’ve told me, that the King is safe with you.”

Latour kept his temper, but its irritation showed itself in a curious twitching of the eyebrows and in an increased sharpness in his voice.

“You admit, then, that my information is correct?”

“On the contrary,” Ellesdon answered with a good-humoured laugh, “I make no admissions, and I am sure that you will press me for none.”

“You are caution itself, Mr. Ellesdon, but don’t you think that Stephen Limbry’s story calls for some explanation between friends?”

“Between friends, no,” said Ellesdon readily. If the man persisted in pumping him, it was fair enough to put him off the scent. “But, as you insist, M. Latour, I will confess to you that I have been trying to help the escape of a Royalist officer from Worcester, who had taken refuge with me. If you ask for his name, you shall have it. It was Johnny Erle who brought him here.”

The apparent candour of the admission bewildered Latour. “Of course I shall not ask his name,” he answered. “You tell me it was not the King.”

“No, he was not the King,” said Ellesdon simply.

“ But you know where the King is ? ” rejoined the other sharply.

“ No, I do not,” said Ellesdon, accurately enough.

Latour rose.

“ Enough, Mr. Ellesdon,” he said with some dignity. “ I am not a cross-examining lawyer.”

“ And I,” laughed Ellesdon, “ am not a criminal on my defence.”

“ I had hoped that you would honour with your confidence one who may have means of serving the King. As you decline, I shall apply to others, very probably to His Majesty himself.”

Ellesdon started slightly.

“ I don’t wish to discourage you,” he stammered ; “ but — ”

“ But you know nothing ; I understand that you know nothing ; ” the Frenchman smiled sardonically as he nodded his head. Then suddenly his voice changed and he launched a question sharply at his opponent.

“ On your honour, Mr. Ellesdon, on your honour, do you believe King Charles to be in Dorsetshire or not ? ”

For an instant Ellesdon hesitated. Was the man in earnest ? Was he making a mistake in disregarding his appeal ? Then their eyes met, and he instinctively recoiled.

“ On my honour,” he said coolly, “ so far as I know anything about him, I believe that he is not.”

And with a twinge of conscience he assured himself that the answer was literally true. He knew nothing for certain ; but he believed King Charles to be at Trent again ; and Trent was over the Somerset border by at least a mile.

Latour took his hat from the table with a bow.

“ I will not keep you, Mr. Ellesdon. It is always agree-

able to exchange impressions with a gentleman so loyal and acute."

Ellesdon ushered him out with alacrity, and walked with him to the stable where he had left his horse.

"By the way, Mr. Ellesdon," the Frenchman added, "there was a little matter which, if it were not officious, I thought I would mention to you. I have just been to see your tenant, Stephen Limbry."

"Oh, have you?" said Ellesdon, not too well pleased.

"Yes, on my way here. I was curious to hear his story. But be easy; he was as discreet as yourself. It's his daughter in whom I am interested now."

"Oh, are you?" said Ellesdon, drily, again.

"Yes, and not at all ashamed to avow it. I saw her at Lady Trenchard's the other day, and it occurred to me there that a certain young Mr. Trenchard had seen her too."

Ellesdon opened his eyes and then frowned. He knew it was true.

"Her parents want to place her in service, and I promised them to mention it to you. It might be a wise act just now to place her out of the reach of gossip, and a kind act to place her where young Trenchard would not be likely to go."

Ellesdon opened his eyes still wider. But he did not doubt that the advice was good.

"I believe that Mrs. Hyde of Heale wants such a servant, if you will forgive my interference in such affairs."

Ellesdon laughed outright.

"How on earth do you know the needs of my aunt's household, M. Latour?"

"Oh, I know everything," cried Latour gaily, as he mounted. "It is my business to take note of everything,

from the appearance of a dairymaid to the disappearance of a King."

Ellesdon watched him ride off, with feelings curiously mixed. There was something uncanny in the man's omniscient acquaintance with the secrets of all the people round.

"No honest man knows so much," he said unreasonably, "though that's a good idea about Rose. I'm glad I told him nothing. But"—he paused—"I should like another talk with Hugh and Johnny, and, by Jove, I will have one too!"

But while Ellesdon laid his plans to go to Salisbury, Latour was riding slowly back along the cliffs.

"I was not mistaken," he reflected. "He couldn't deny my suspicions, though he fences better than I had supposed. I am on the right track, I am certain. Yet he does not believe the King to be in Dorsetshire. I will find out. I will go cautiously. After that fiasco yesterday, I must have positive proof before I strike. I think we will make a few more enquiries at Charmouth on our way home."

CHAPTER XII

CONSPIRATORS AT HEALE AND SALISBURY

JULIANA CONINGSBY was talking earnestly with Dr. Henchman under an ancient cedar upon the lawn at Heale. The sun shone cloudless; the river Avon murmured at their feet; the rooks from the tall elms opposite circled above them, and the voices of blackbirds piped in the yellowing woods. Miss Coningsby raised her head for a moment and listened, smiling.

“Enchanting! Isn’t it?” she said.

“It is enchanting,” answered the Doctor, smiling also, and gazing directly at her.

Her eyes met his.

“Oh, what nonsense!” she laughed. “Dr. Henchman!” And with a blush she plunged deep into talk again.

Another young woman, still taller and fairer to look on, was watching them from a window of the old red house. The new dairymaid had just entered on her duties, and was arranging her personal belongings in a little room which overlooked the lawn. The beauty of the morning had drawn her to the window, and it shone in her beautiful eyes. In her hands she held a little portrait, tenderly, furtively, closely, and her thoughts travelled out across the woodlands towards the dim spire under which her lover dwelt. For General Desborough had moved Tom Trenchard’s troop to Salisbury; and Mrs. Hyde and her friend Mrs. Coventry had not been deaf to M. Latour’s appeal.

Presently the noise of a bell ringing broke the stillness,

and a deep voice called a stable-boy. Miss Coningsby heard the voice, and seemed to know it, for her eyes wandered to the garden-door.

“Yes, we must bring him here,” said Dr. Henchman; “that is settled. And now I think you want to go.”

“Not at all, not at all,” said Julia quickly. But almost as she spoke she rose and moved towards the house, for Ellesdon and Johnny Erle, booted and spurred and dusty, had come out upon the lawn.

“Here are more conspirators,” said Dr. Henchman.

“If there are any risks going, Doctor,” laughed Julia, “they are sure to be there.”

“Like moths to the candle,” added the Prebendary.

“And may one ask which of you is the candle?” Johnny enquired.

“No, Johnny, don’t ask embarrassing questions. I should like you to come here and talk to me, if Miss Coningsby could conveniently take Mr. Ellesdon to pick plums.”

But the two others had already strayed beyond the reach of pleasantries, and were walking, forgetful of the world, deliciously apart, hidden by the garden-hedges from all eyes except one maiden’s at a window, who sighed as she wondered if ever for her a lover would come with a claim as open and confident as that.

“Now tell me this moment,” said the Prebendary, “everything that has happened since I saw you last.”

Johnny began, but was stopped directly.

“No, Julia told me that,” said Dr. Henchman. “I want your story from the time you led the troopers helter-skelter out of Broad Windsor the other night. I’ve been out here staying, and so have heard nothing properly till Julia arrived yesterday from Trent.”

So Johnny told his story, and the Doctor chuckled.

"And since then," he asked, as Erle ended, "you've been in Salisbury? Why didn't you come out here before?"

"Well, I've been waiting for instructions," said Johnny. "Besides that, I wasn't sorry to get some sleep."

"Sleep! Pooh! You're tough enough," said the Doctor. "I should have come in to Salisbury, but I've had the gout. And your aunt, Mrs. Hyde, is the kindest creature, and wouldn't let me stir."

"There was nothing to stir for. They're all right at Trent."

"Julia says that Lord Wilmot is in Salisbury."

"Yes, at Mr. Coventry's. He's been making enquiries, I believe, about a ship."

"I understand that he's thinking of Southampton. But the Gunters have a plan which I prefer."

"The King is leaving Trent, isn't he?" Johnny sank his voice to a whisper.

"Yes; you needn't mutter. This old cedar's as staunch a Royalist as you."

"Mutter!" said John with dignity. "I'm afraid, sir, you're a little deaf."

"Nothing of the kind," said the Prebendary sharply. "But they're getting uneasy at Trent, and they're bringing him here."

"Here!" exclaimed Johnny aloud.

"Yes, don't shout out about it. Your aunt Mrs. Hyde is the kindest creature —"

"So you said before, sir; all the Erles are that."

"She is certain to help us. But we haven't explained matters yet to her."

"Then she'll take him for me to a certainty," said Johnny.

"Don't give yourself airs, John," the Prebendary retorted.

"It is not an unmixed advantage," said Johnny, sighing, "to possess all the attributes of a King."

"What has Ellesdon come for?" asked the Prebendary, ignoring this sally.

"Really, sir, with your powers of observation, I thought you would have guessed."

Dr. Henchman snorted.

"I don't mean here; that's obvious; I mean why has he come to Salisbury?"

"Well, I think the Cathedral dignitaries attract him," said John. And then he told the Prebendary about Latour's visit to Lyme.

"I don't like that Frenchman. Don't trust him; don't trust him!"

And Johnny readily promised that he would not.

The young men did not pay a long visit. John insisted on carrying his cousin away. They had a message from Lord Wilmot for Col. Robert Phelps, a well-known West country Royalist, who was in the secret of the movements of the King. They might have a long ride to find Colonel Phelps. And then it might be necessary to go on to Trent.

"Besides which," he said to Julia, "I dare say your conversation is exhausted. Dr. Henchman was even beginning to get bored with me."

"Impudence palls," Miss Coningsby retorted.

"But adulation never, I presume," said John.

From a terrace at the end of the garden Miss Coningsby watched them ride away, and then—Dr. Henchman had left her—returned towards the house alone. As she passed under the windows she heard a little cry and something fluttered to her feet. She looked up. A girl's face, strange to her and lovely, was leaning out of a small window overhead.

"Oh, Madam," said a sweet voice in distress, "I beg your pardon. I dropped it. I will come round and fetch it," and the fair head promptly disappeared.

Inevitably Julia stooped to pick up the object at her feet. It was the portrait of a boy, hardly yet come to manhood, heavy featured but gallant enough with his broad shoulders, clear face and smart coat.

"It can hardly be a brother," thought Julia, smiling. "He looks like a gentleman too. Surely, somewhere, I have seen that face before."

But even while she was looking at the portrait, a hand was held out at her side, and a shy voice asked for it back. Julia turned and smiled at the beautiful creature before her.

"What is your name, child?" she asked.

"Rose Limbry, ma'am. I have just come to Heale."

"And this is a keepsake, eh, Rose?"

"Yes, ma'am, from a friend." The girl's face was crimson, and there was a note of alarm in her voice. Miss Coningsby, with all the feudal instincts of her class and time, was tempted to question her further; such questions were natural enough. But the girl's confusion stopped her, and perhaps the sympathy born of her own love.

"Well, well," she said, "I'll ask no more about it. I don't wonder, child, at your having many—friends."

But that evening something recalled the incident to Julia's mind. She had been walking in the park and at dusk was returning past a shrubbery which skirted one side of the house, when a man's figure suddenly stepped out across her path. Startled for a moment, she drew back with a cry, and he paused, startled also, to look where the cry came from. He was a big, soldierly fellow, with the free carriage of a gentleman and a heavy, handsome face, and he lifted his hat, as he saw her, with a very courteous air.

"I am afraid I startled you," he said slowly. "Can you tell me the way to the road?"

"The nearest way to the road is there behind you," said Julia, pointing. And with a bow he turned and left her there.

"Now that," said Miss Coningsby to herself, "is the young man in the portrait. But he's older since then, and Rose Limbry had better take care." She went on to the house and paused again upon the doorstep. "I'm sure I've seen him. I believe he was once a schoolfellow of Hugh's. But Hugh's friends have no business at the back-door here."

While Mr. Thomas Trenchard thus endangered reputations by making idleness the minister of love, M. Latour, who never gave way to either weakness, was looking for him vainly in his quarters under Salisbury spire. Latour was pleased at his own sagacity in guessing that Salisbury would be the best centre for watching the Royalists' designs. A few adroit questions at the King's Arms Inn, where he was staying, had informed him that Johnny Erle was staying at his uncle's house, that Mr. Coventry had an unknown gentleman as his visitor, and that Dr. Henchman, whose sagacity he distrusted, was happily away at Heale. Of the King's whereabouts he had no positive information. Mr. Coventry's unknown visitor, though probably a Royalist agent, was hardly likely to be he. But his suspicions still pointed towards Trent. And in spite of Ellesdon's rebuff, he was determined to obtain admittance to the counsels of the Cavalier gentry, as one of their confederates, if he could. The treachery involved in such a plan did not occur to him, for M. Latour had a Machiavellian indifference to the morality of the schemes by which he won success. He would see Mr. Coventry and his mysterious

visitor, and he would not give them the opportunity of declining to be found at home.

He went out into the Close and reconnoitred. Mr. Coventry's house faced upon the street. But that garden, which he recalled, must have some other access. M. Latour pondered a moment. Yes, out of the Close under an archway there ran a narrow path, which probably communicated with Coventry's garden at the back. But the gate under the archway was padlocked, and the Frenchman tried it in vain. He walked away and met a milk-boy sauntering up the Close.

"I suppose that path under the archway leads to the back of Mr. Coventry's house?" he asked.

"That?" said the boy. "Oh, yes, that leads into his garden. But it's private. You can't go that way."

"Oh, it's private, is it?"

"Yes, the gardener keeps the key; but he won't let no one through except a Bishop, and you don't look like that, by your legs."

"Why do they shut it up?"

"Oh, to keep out marbles, and cats, and vagrants. We're very pertickler in the Close."

Latour gave him a small coin.

"Thank you, sir. I'm sure I wish you was a Bishop. The front door of Mr. Coventry's is just round that corner."

"Thank you, milk-boy."

"Martin's my name, sir. They might let you in, if you mentioned it there."

M. Latour laughed and the milk-boy chuckled, as he moved elated up the Close.

A gardener was sweeping up leaves on the gravel. He came nearer and nearer to the little gate. Latour thought

for a moment, and then glanced at the sky. The wind had risen since the morning and was blowing freshly now. Latour took a note-book from his pocket and tore out two or three leaves. Then he moved close to the gate, and leaning against it, proceeded to write rapidly upon the loose pages in his hand. Suddenly a puff of wind carried them from him, and two of them floated over the gate and down the little path beyond. The gardener stopped sweeping and looked up at Latour's cry of annoyance.

"There; you've lost 'em now," he said with a grin.

"But that will never do. I can't afford to lose them," said the Frenchman. "I must go after them." He rattled the gate vainly. "Ah, it is locked! I must beg you to recover them. Can you not help me?" And a coin glistened in his hand.

"Well, I have a key," said the gardener doubtfully.

"The very thing. Please lend it me a moment. Those papers are important. You would oblige me so." And a second coin followed the first.

"There can't be any harm in picking them up, can there?" said the gardener. Gentlemen so obliging must clearly be obliged. And he pulled out a key and opened the gate.

Latour stepped past him quickly. But as he stooped to pick up the papers, they seemed to rise and fly before him, till he had advanced some way along the lane, far enough to see a small gate which led directly into the garden of Mr. Coventry's house. He touched it with his hand and it was open. The gardener called him back. Latour nodded in reply.

"All right, my friend. I'm going through this way to Mr. Coventry's. You can lock that gate up. Many thanks." And leaving the gardener staring, Latour boldly

opened the garden gate in front, and advanced rapidly through a small belt of shrubs. His elaborate manœuvres were rewarded. Mr. Coventry, with a tall man handsomely dressed beside him, was walking up and down the lawn.

Latour stepped forward, hat in hand. "Mr. Coventry," he said, "I fear this is a most informal entry. I had a blundering guide. I trust I don't intrude."

"Not at all, not at all," said Coventry kindly. But his glance at his companion showed dismay.

"I will retire at once if I interrupt a private conversation. Indeed, it was to Mrs. Coventry that I had hoped first to pay my respects."

"I'm sure Mrs. Coventry will be glad to see you," Coventry answered. He turned to his companion. "This gentleman is—upon my soul, now, I've forgotten your name."

"Latour."

"Of course. He knows all our friends in Paris."

"Ah!" Mr. Coventry's guest for the first time showed signs of interest. "Pray don't let him retire on my account."

"I have the honour," said Latour boldly, "of knowing several of King Charles' friends, and I should welcome any opportunity of showing that I deserve to be considered one of them myself."

Mr. Coventry's guest looked at the Frenchman fixedly, then made a scarcely perceptible gesture to his host.

"Yes, of course," his host responded; "you ought to know each other. This, M. Latour, is Mr.—er"—he paused with a glance of comical distress—"really, in the matter of names my head is little better than a sieve."

"I am quite ready, Mr. Coventry," said Latour, smiling, "to call your visitor by any title that he may prefer. But

no one who has heard of English loyalty needs to be told Lord Wilmot's name."

" You know me, sir ? " said Wilmot with a start.

" By sight, my Lord, well, and by reputation better. I should think it an honour to know you more. Indeed, I will confess it was partly in the hope of finding you that I came to call on Mr. Coventry to-day."

" Lord Wilmot's visit is, of course, entirely private," said Coventry, hurriedly. " We may trust you to keep the secret, M. Latour ? "

" As you do yourselves," Latour answered with dignity. " My Lord, your peril must be the excuse for my intrusion, and the peril of one whose safety is still dearer to us all. I have ventured to seek you because I hope to be of service to King Charles."

It was characteristic of the Frenchman that the more impudent the falsehood he was telling, the statelier grew his bearing and the more grandiose his tale.

" Then we had better ask you plainly, M. Latour, to begin with, what you know of the movements of the King."

" I know, my Lord, almost all you know yourselves. I know of his flight from Worcester, of his attempts to reach the coast, of his concealment in this neighbourhood, of the failure to get a ship at Lyme, of the zeal and devotion of his friends in Salisbury —— "

Latour paused; the other men's faces had grown very grave.

" And knowing this," the Frenchman continued, " all I ask is to help in securing His Majesty's escape."

Wilmot bowed with a magnificent courtesy and held out his hand.

" Then it only remains for us to welcome you, M. Latour,

as a colleague, and to ask what advice you have to give."

At a sign from Wilmot, Mr. Coventry led the way into the house, and there round a table they gathered, and Latour with easy duplicity propounded his scheme for effecting the King's escape.

"It is clear," he said, "that the best course is to find a vessel sailing for France, and that a French captain who expects to be rewarded rather than punished for the service, will be readier than an Englishman to take the risk. It is clear"—laying his finger on a map outspread before them—"that the ports of Dorsetshire are very unsafe for the King. But it should not be difficult to reach Southampton; and at Southampton there is now to my knowledge a French vessel on the point of returning to Havre, in which I am offered a passage for myself and any friends or attendants I may bring. Your Lordship would not have any objection to this plan?"

"Not at all," said Wilmot frankly. "It sounds most promising and it falls in entirely with my own ideas."

"Will you trust me to make the arrangements?"

"Thank you, M. Latour. But I feel I must be responsible myself."

"I could ask nothing better, my Lord, than to have such companions as His Majesty King Charles and you. There would be no difficulty with the Captain of the vessel. I have authority which he recognizes from the Government of France."

Wilmot nodded. He was evidently impressed.

"That might be of service. Of course before deciding anything, I must communicate with my friends." He glanced at the clock and rose.

"Of course, of course. You will let me know when you

have decided. A note to the King's Arms would find me any time."

Wilmot smiled. "You put up at the right house. Well, give me two days, M. Latour, and you shall have my answer. My friend, Mr. Coventry, will know how to find me, if you have any further information to send. Now, Coventry, my time is up."

Coventry led his guest to the door, while the Frenchman waited. During his absence Latour was posted at the window, which looked into the street, but on Coventry's return he was gazing with rapt attention at a portrait of King Charles I over the chimneypiece. He wheeled suddenly round, and seized Coventry's hand with emotion. A strange light shone in his eyes.

"My friend," he said, "I cannot sufficiently thank you. I came here an intruder, a stranger. You have trusted me as one of yourselves. You shall see that your generous confidence is not unworthily placed."

Coventry was bewildered, a little touched, a little ashamed. He had not been by any means so anxious to welcome Latour's coöperation, and this was heaping coals of fire upon his head. But the Frenchman was one of themselves—he couldn't doubt it—and it seemed that he might render the greatest service to the cause.

"No, no, we're in your debt," he said; "that's the right view of the matter." He wished Latour would stop wringing his hand.

"Then you shall pay your debt at once," said the Frenchman gaily. "Give a line of introduction to Colonel Wyndham at Trent."

"At Trent!" Coventry changed colour slightly. "Why, you know him, don't you? You met him here the other night."

“ Yes, as a stranger. But I should like a note from you to assure him that he may look on me as a friend. You could do that ? ”

“ Oh yes, I could,” said Coventry, “ if you really wish it. You are not going immediately to Trent ? ”

“ Oh no, not now. But I shall be travelling in that direction later. The truth is, there is a young lady in the family whom I should like to see again.”

“ Ah ! ” Coventry laughed ; that was a reason that appealed to him. “ Take care. You may find her bespoken.”

“ I must take my chance. But it would be a strong recommendation if I carried a certificate of character from you.”

“ Not with young ladies.”

“ No, but with the family. Colonel Wyndham is courtesy itself, I know, and I am perhaps over-sensitive. But you Englishmen can build a stone wall so politely between the men you tolerate and the men you trust.”

Coventry laughed again. “ Can we ? Well, of course I could write a line for you.”

“ Not if I ask too much.”

“ Oh, no, no, no. I’ll write it.” And Coventry sat at the table and wrote it there and then.

“ You will mention that Lord Wilmot knows me to be devoted to the service of the King ? ”

“ Well, I will hint that,” said Coventry, “ so that our friends will understand it. It isn’t a very safe thing to say outright.”

He gave him the note.

“ That is worth many testimonials,” said Latour, as he took it. “ Now, one more favour—may I see Mrs. Coventry before I leave ? ”

"To be sure! She's most anxious to ask you how you acquired your knowledge of dairymaids over here." Coventry laughed. He was scarcely less anxious to be quit of a guest with whose vagaries he found it difficult to cope. "Women, I suppose, are more like Frenchmen," he reflected; "that's why they seem to understand them. 'Pon my soul, it's more than I can do."

Which was just the conclusion on which Latour had impudently traded all that afternoon. As he walked back to his inn, he tapped the breast-pocket in which Coventry's note to Colonel Wyndham lay, and broke out into a quiet laugh. "So far our surmises have prospered surprisingly well. It was a stroke of luck meeting with Wilmot, but it was a happy inspiration which told me that Coventry's visitor might be worth taking unawares. I think that the great prize is netted. But one certainty is worth many surmises. I must explore the mysteries of Trent. What a fool an Englishman is! He hates emotion, but the least display of it throws him off his guard. With Mr. Coventry's letter and Lord Wilmot's confidence, I ought to be able to see all I want at Trent." He threw back his head and laughed again. As he did so, he turned a corner and nearly ran into the arms of Canon Erle.

The Canon was extending his arms at the moment to welcome a middle-aged lady, who was crossing the road to greet him; and as the lady's eyes fell on Latour and marked his laughter, she also broke into a ringing laugh. Between them the Canon stood, glancing from one to the other, completely perplexed; and Latour too paused, bewildered, until he recognized in the genial newcomer his recent acquaintance, Mrs. Hyde of Heale.

"Brother," she said, laying a hand on the Canon's arm, "I have been to your house and missed you, so I'm glad to

meet you here. But I must first introduce you to my friend, M. Latour, from France; and if you ever want a pretty dairymaid, allow me to recommend his taste."

By this time Latour was bowing as gaily as Mrs. Hyde herself. "It is Canon Erle, I think," he said, "so well known as a student of Horace."

The Canon coloured with pleasure. "It is easy to see, Mary," he said, "that M. Latour belongs to a nation with whom courtesy is a fine art."

"There! I knew you would like each other," said Mrs. Hyde. "Anthony, those nephews of yours were over at Heale this morning. Where are they now?"

"I was about to ask the same question," Latour interposed, "for I have the pleasure of knowing Mr. Ellesdon and Mr. John Erle."

"Oh, have you?" said the Canon. "Then you know two bewildering young men. I don't undertake to answer for their movements. At this moment they may be—" The Canon paused.

"At Trent, perhaps?" Latour suggested.

"No, no," said the Canon quickly, "they are not at Trent; not, I think, at Trent."

"It doesn't much matter," said Mrs. Hyde. "I know that Willie Ellesdon is sure to be soon again at Heale. There is a lodestone there, you know."

"Naturally," said Latour, with a pointed bow to the lady.

Mrs. Hyde laughed. "I mean Juliana Coningsby," she said. "M. Latour, you must come over and see us. I hope you will. Now, Anthony, give me an arm."

And with that Latour was left to pursue his way.

"So Mr. Ellesdon has come here. Well, he must be careful. I should be loth to interrupt the course of love.

And Miss Coningsby has come from Trent. And Mr. Johnny Erle is—or is not—in Salisbury, and his uncle does not like to have it thought he is at Trent. It is astonishing how useful to an observant nature the small talk of a provincial town may be. Yes, more and more I feel that the mysteries of Trent must be explored."

Col. Robert Phelps was well known in the neighbourhood as one of the most important and devoted of the followers of the King. Montacute House, his beautiful home near Trent, had been confiscated by the government of the Commonwealth, and its owner was then lodging in Salisbury, like many another dispossessed Cavalier. On the King's return to Trent, he had been taken into the secret of his movements, and for some days past he had been actively aiding Lord Wilmot in his endeavours to find a ship at some Hampshire port. Phelps had visited Southampton and had actually engaged a vessel there, which, however, was immediately pressed by the Government to help in victualling Blake's fleet before Jersey. The plan for an escape, however, from one of the Hampshire or Sussex ports held good; it had been determined to bring the King nearer to Salisbury, which was now the headquarters of the Royalist schemes; and that day Phelps had ridden off to his own property where, dispossessed as he was, he could always find agents to obey him, in order to arrange for the journey of the King. Johnny had followed with a message from Lord Wilmot, and Ellesdon, for company's sake, had gone with him.

In a low-browed farmhouse among the uplands, not far from Montacute, and commanding the highroad to Trent, Colonel Phelps and the two young men were gathered round a table, studying a map. It was late and theirs was the only light which shone at that hour upon the road—a

light the more valuable to the traveller because at that point the road parted into two. Suddenly Johnny looked up from the map and rubbed his eyes.

"I know the route now by heart," he said, "and it makes my eyes ache."

"You've been asleep for the last ten minutes," said Ellesdon; "that's what it is."

"Nothing of the kind," said John; "I'm the most wakeful of the party. Listen! Can either of you hear a horse walking up the road?"

"I can't," said Colonel Phelps with a smile.

"There is one," said John confidently. "Now it's stopped at the crossroads. The rider is in doubt about his way."

"Go on," said Ellesdon disrespectfully. "Tell us the colour of his stockings and his mother's maiden name."

Johnny disdained to notice the remark. He rose and moved to the window, drew back the curtain, and looked out into the night. Nothing was visible; everything was still.

"He is now," said Ellesdon, jeering, "dismounting and walking up the garden path."

"Not yet," said John, "but he will in a moment, I dare say. Listen!"

Almost as he spoke, they heard the noise of a heavy footfall, as of a rider leaping to the ground. With an exclamation of surprise Colonel Phelps stepped to the window, but the night was so dark that nothing could be seen outside.

"The phantom has stopped," said Ellesdon, still incredulous.

"No, but he's very quiet," said John, whose hearing was acute. "If he's coming here, he's coming across the turf. Perhaps he's made up his mind which road to take."

"I'll go out and see if there's any one there," said Ellesdon.

"No; wait," said John. "This is my ghost. Just listen."

And listen, with a certain sense of eeriness, they did.

"Come back from the window," said Johnny.

And the Colonel drew back. A curious feeling of mystery had taken possession of them. Then all of a sudden Johnny touched his cousin on the shoulder. A long sallow face, with dark eyes and sinister upturned eyebrows was gazing at them through the window-panes.

With a start Ellesdon leaped to his feet and made for the door, while the others followed. But the passage was dark, and the outer door was locked. Ellesdon fumbled with the key and that delayed them. When they broke through, they could still see nothing for a moment, till their eyes became accustomed to the dark. And when that happened, there was nothing left to see.

But Johnny was on his knees with his ear to the ground.

"It was that fellow Latour. I could swear to him anywhere," said Ellesdon.

"Yes," said Johnny, rising, "and if he didn't know his way, he's chanced it. I think he's riding down the road to Trent."

And this time even his cousin forbore to scoff.

CHAPTER XIII

GOOD-BYE TO TRENT

CHARLES and his party, when delivered from the presence of the troopers at Broad Windsor, had made their way back safely without mishap to Trent, and there for ten days the King had lain concealed in his old quarters, while fresh schemes for his escape were set on foot. Lord Wilmot moved freely to and fro between Trent and Salisbury, taking counsel with Dr. Henchman, Colonel Phelips, and other friends of the King, and in this part of the story the Hydes and their connections, who were scattered through the Southern counties, play a conspicuous part. Canon Erle's sister, the widowed Mrs. Hyde of Heale, was closely associated with the Royalists in Salisbury. Another Hyde, her brother-in-law, had his home near Hambledon, not far away in Hampshire. Another Hyde was married to Colonel Gunter, of Racton near Chichester, beneath the Sussex downs ; and one of the Gunters was the wife of Mr. Thomas Symons, who also lived in the Hambledon district, on the edge of the Forest of Bere. The ladies and gentlemen alike of this connection threw themselves heart and soul into the service of the King ; and Lord Wilmot rode over the country to visit and confer with them, while Charles awaited the results of this activity at Trent. One result was the negotiation for a ship at Southampton, which Colonel Phelips had almost concluded, when the scheme fell through. Another plan, which Colonel Gunter favoured, was to look for a vessel in one of the small fishing villages along the Sussex

coast. Wilmot himself still inclined to the idea of Southampton, and Latour's convenient offer had appealed strongly to his mind. Meanwhile it had been decided to bring the King to the neighbourhood of Salisbury, and for that purpose Julia Coningsby had been sent over to prepare the way at Heale.

It says much for the fidelity of the Royalists, and little perhaps for the vigour of the authorities on the other side, that King Charles, after his luckless enterprise at Charmouth, should have been allowed to return unnoticed and to remain undiscovered at Trent. A large reward was out for his apprehension ; details of his appearance were being published everywhere broadcast. The authorities had strong grounds for believing him to be hiding in the neighbourhood ; and his partisans were in active consultation all through the countryside. Never had Colonel Wyndham and his family passed through a more harassing and anxious time than the fortnight immediately following their return. They were all deeply discouraged by the failure at Lyme. Each day they expected to hear that the pursuit was on their trail. They had not Johnny's inexhaustible spirits to cheer them. They knew that Lord Wilmot was courting discovery by riding so freely abroad, and that his capture would almost inevitably be a clue to the hiding-place of the King. They had the hardest task of all, to wait in patience while others exerted themselves on their behalf. But as each day passed, and nothing occurred to alarm them, their fears subsided and their hopes revived. The King's buoyant temper reasserted itself, turned its back on disappointments and reverses, and began to form fresh schemes to baffle the dull-witted movements of his foes.

“ If they can't discover me here,” he said laughing, “ after all the clues that we've given them, it's clear that

our enemies' intelligence is not a thing of which to be afraid."

During this pause, M. Latour was completing his enquiries, communicating with his friends and agents, and drawing his net more closely round the King. Indeed, he would before this have made his way to Trent, to verify his suspicions, had he not been diverted by a rumour which misled the authorities too, that Charles was in hiding in the neighbourhood of Charmouth or in one of the villages near the Dorsetshire seacoast. So convinced were the authorities of the truth of this report, which probably arose from the fact that Robert Wyndham was hiding in the district, that Pilsdon House, the home of Sir Hugh Wyndham, and several other Royalist houses near, were roughly searched by troops. Latour himself, after leaving Bridport, had spent some days in visiting the seacoast towns, as far East as Southampton, where he came on traces of Lord Wilmot, and devised a new scheme for winning and betraying the confidence of the King. It was thus October before he had retraced his steps to Salisbury, more than ever convinced that his first impressions had been right.

Meanwhile the King was lodged in his old quarters, occupying Lady Wyndham's bedroom in the upper story, with the secret room at hand in case of need. Here he spent the days, thinking, planning, talking, sleeping, cooking his own meals in his chamber, taking the air only at the windows, patiently waiting for news from the world outside. Once or twice dangerous reports alarmed the household. On the Sunday morning after his return, a tailor came up from the village to warn Colonel Wyndham that there was a rumour about that he had persons of quality, Malignants, hidden in his house. The Colonel replied that he had guests, it was true, but only his brother-in-law, Colonel

Reymes, who had no cause to hide himself, and that it was his intention to bring him to church that very day. To church, accordingly, Lord Wilmot went with his host, in the character of Colonel Reymes, whom he resembled ; and the public appearance of the two gentlemen in the Colonel's family pew, which had long been unoccupied, and the ostentatious respect with which they listened to the discourse of the Puritan divine, not only dispelled all suspicions, but won new friends for Colonel Wyndham among the zealots of the place.

Another day, Mrs. Wyndham rode over to Sherborne, on a visit, to pick up any news that might be gained, and there she was met by the alarming tidings that a troop of horse had just ridden into the town. So she galloped back to Trent to give them warning ; and the King, in spite of his laughing protests, was packed into the little secret room ; and all that night the Colonel and Hugh sat up, fully armed, to keep watch in the silent house, until the dawn came and the news came with it that the troops had quietly moved off to the seacoast. But beyond these two adventures no incident occurred to trouble the security of the King's second stay at Trent—"the ark," as Mrs. Wyndham calls it in her quaint old narrative—"the ark in which God shut him up when the floods of rebellion had covered the face of his dominions. Here he rested nineteen days"—she counts the two visits together—"to give his faithful servants time to work his deliverance ; and the Almighty crowned their endeavours with success ; that His Majesty"—so blindly and loyally steadfast, thirty years later, is the lady's belief in the charming young Sovereign of her earlier days—"might live to appear as glorious in his actions as courageous in his sufferings."

On the night of the fifth of October, however, Colonel

Wyndham had a momentary fright. Of late he had become a restless sleeper, and often rose to listen and look out; and on one of these visits to the window he was startled by hearing distinctly, as he fancied, footsteps on the path outside. He threw back the casement with a rattle and leaned out. The noise had vanished, and there was a veil of mist across the sky. Still dissatisfied, he waited; then struck a light, and walked slowly through the house. Everything seemed quiet; but there could be no harm in making sure. He took a lantern and marched round outside. As the front door opened, he listened, and heard dimly, away towards the village, the trotting of a horse. But beyond that there was nothing, and smiling at his nervousness, he returned to bed. Next morning, before he was dressed, a servant came up to tell him that a gentleman, who gave no name, was waiting to see him below. Full of apprehension, the Colonel hurried down, to find M. Latour in the parlour, examining the pictures on the wall.

The Frenchman came towards him immediately with a letter and a bow.

“I arrived late last night, Colonel Wyndham,” he said, “and slept at the tavern in the village——”

“I heard you,” said the Colonel, “at least, I think I heard your horse.”

Latour stared. “Indeed! Yet I could hardly have passed your gateway. Or if I did, it was so late and so dark that I passed it unawares. Had I been earlier, I should have intruded on you, for”—he glanced round cautiously and dropped his voice—“I come on urgent business of the King’s.”

The Colonel stared in his turn. “I don’t understand,” he stammered.

“You mean, you are not sure if you can trust me,” said

Latour with a peculiar smile. "Read that, Colonel"—and he handed him Coventry's letter—"and let me add that I come direct from Lord Wilmot with a proposal for the King."

The Colonel's honest face clouded with perplexity. He read Coventry's letter. He looked hard at his guest.

"M. Latour," he said anxiously, "you come as a friend, of course."

"I hoped that Colonel Wyndham would not insult me by questioning that." The Frenchman drew himself up with proud emotion. There was a world of wounded honour in his tone.

"Forgive me, Monsieur Latour," said the Colonel hastily. "But the times are so perilous, and my responsibility is so grave."

The Frenchman took a sudden turn across the room. When he came back his emotion had vanished. He sat down and spoke with almost a mournful earnestness, as he fixed his gaze across the table on his host.

"Monsieur le Colonel," he said, "I know I am a stranger. I have not fought for your King. I have not suffered for him. I cannot point to such a record of splendid devotion as your house. But, as a loyal gentleman of France, I ask your permission to show that I can serve a distressed gentleman as faithfully as any English Cavalier."

The Colonel was touched. "Go on, sir," he said gently. "Tell me what you wish that I should do."

"For the last three weeks," said Latour impressively, "I have known almost every movement of the King's."

The Colonel started.

"I know of the attempt at Charmouth and the failure there. I know of Lord Wilmot's plans at Southampton, which have failed as well."

The Colonel's face grew more and more alarmed and anxious as his guest went on.

"I have come here with a fresh proposal, to which yesterday at Salisbury I secured Lord Wilmot's assent; I have a French ship waiting at Southampton in which I guarantee a safe passage for King Charles. And now, Colonel Wyndham,"—he rose to his feet and his voice rang sharply—"by Lord Wilmot's authority I ask you to conduct me at once to the presence of the King."

The Colonel leaped to his feet also. Denial seemed impossible and remonstrance vain. Latour had played his part consummately. His words, his manner, the letter he brought, the knowledge he showed, the series of shrewd and accurate guesses which he had formed, the bold assurance with which he had staked all on the correctness of his own surmise—alike made any attempt at concealment seem a farce. Even as he hesitated, Colonel Wyndham knew that to refuse was idle.

"The presence of the King," he stammered.

"Yes. I know of course that he is here."

"You know that he is here?"

"I have known it all the time," said Latour quietly. "Had I been going to betray him, I should surely have done it before this." He smiled, and taking off his sword laid it down on the table between them, and turned the hilt towards his host. "You see, I place myself in your hands, Monsieur. I trust you completely—as I think you now trust me."

"Of course, of course," the Colonel assented quickly. Then he paused. "I will take His Majesty's pleasure, M. Latour," he added with dignity, "if you will be good enough to follow me up-stairs."

And up-stairs the Frenchman followed him, with a very ugly smile of triumph on his face.

Early that morning Colonel Phelps started from his lodging to fetch the King at Trent. Johnny Erle and Ellesdon, were with him, and they took with them a led horse for the King, furnished with a double saddle, for Miss Coningsby was to join them on the way. Charles was to wear his old disguise as a groom, and in the later part of the journey was to ride again before Miss Coningsby, who was coming out from Heale to meet them at midday. Phelps and Ellesdon were to form the escort, and Johnny was to be left behind. In a very short time they covered the distance, and found Colonel Wyndham's chimney-stacks coming into view. But they had hardly turned in at the gateway, when they saw Hugh hurrying to meet them, and Johnny reined up in wonder at the alarm written large in Hugh's face.

“Why, Hugh, what's the matter?” he asked.

“I don't know; it may be all right,” Hugh stammered, “but Latour is up there with the King.”

“Latour! With the King! Who let him pass?” asked Johnny and Ellesdon in a breath.

“My father,” said Hugh. “He had to. He came with a message from Lord Wilmot. They sent him here to see the King.”

“If Lord Wilmot sent him, that's all right,” said Phelps. “Besides, your father must have reasons.”

“He'd no choice,” Hugh answered; “Latour knew everything, he said.”

Johnny was scanning his cousin's face, but did not find it reassuring.

“All the same, I don't trust the Frenchman,” Ellesdon said.

“Nor I,” said John.

“Well, the King's not staying here much longer, happily,” said Phelps, “and we're not bound to tell this gentleman where he's going to next.”

And Johnny, with a look at Ellesdon, registered a silent vow, which he whispered to Hugh as they dismounted and passed together into the house.

Mrs. Wyndham, the Colonel's wife, and old Lady Wyndham, his mother, were waiting in the parlour down-stairs, and Johnny stayed with them, while Hugh led Phelps and Ellesdon up to the King's room. The Colonel came to the door to receive them, and they were admitted without delay. Charles was standing waiting, dressed and evidently ready for the start. His face was bright and animated. His spirits were high. He was laughing and talking gaily with Latour, in French as perfect as the Frenchman's own. As the newcomers advanced and kneeled to kiss his hand, he turned to them smiling.

"Well, I am ready, Phelps. We have been having such a gossip here. M. Latour has made me imagine myself back again in France."

"Where, please God, you shall be, sir, in a few days now," said Phelps.

"Then we must manage better than we did at Charmouth, eh, Mr. Ellesdon?" laughed the King.

Ellesdon blushed deeply.

"There, there, it was no fault of yours, man," Charles added kindly. "It was the women who baffled us. It is always so, isn't it, M. Latour?"

"It shall not be so, if you will trust a Frenchman to guide you, sir," Latour responded.

"No? Frenchmen are confident. Yet I have not found them woman-proof in France."

"I hope, while you're in England, sir, you'll still trust Englishmen to guide you," said Ellesdon, a little rashly. He was profoundly distrustful of Latour.

"It would seem that Englishmen too are sometimes con-

fident," said the latter with a quiet sneer. "Especially after what passed recently at Lyme."

"Gentlemen," said the King promptly, "I thank you for your friendly emulation. I know I may rely on you both to help me to the utmost of your power. And now where is Miss Coningsby, Mr. Ellesdon? We can't do without our ladies yet."

"She joins us later, sir," said Ellesdon.

"And I ride with her, I hope, as before?"

"If you will, sir," Phelps answered. "And now, with Your Majesty's permission, we ought to be off."

"By all means," said Charles, and he turned to Colonel Wyndham. "You have been the best of hosts, Frank, and the loyalest of friends."

"Oh, sir, you will let me come with you," cried the Colonel with emotion.

"No, no," said the King firmly. "We have settled that, Frank, you know. It is safer not. The fewer the better. It can't be, old friend"—he took the Colonel's two hands and held them in his own. "There's no man I'd sooner have with me. But we've settled it otherwise. Only, if this new plan fails, like the other, it's a bargain that I come back again to Trent. Now take me to bid the ladies good-bye."

Without further words, but with eyes which glistened strangely, the Colonel led the way down-stairs. The King followed, with Phelps behind him, but as Phelps went out, Hugh softly closed the door. In the parlour John Erle was waiting with the ladies. He saw the Colonel, dim-eyed, usher in the King. He saw Charles go up to the chair where old Lady Wyndham sat, and kneeling bare-headed beside it, raise the old lady's hand with tender deference to his lips. He heard a sob break from Mrs. Wynd-

ham, and feeling soft and uncomfortable, he edged his way to the door. Phelps was standing on the threshold of the room.

"Go up and tell Ellesdon that I want him," he whispered to John. "We start at once."

"All right," said Johnny. "I go back to Salisbury. Do you want the Frenchman too?"

"God forbid!"

Johnny chuckled, and went at a bound up-stairs. When he entered the room which the King had just quitted, his spirits bounded too, for a glance at its occupants told him that there was every prospect of a fray. Hugh stood by the door, alert and watchful. Ellesdon, with his mouth set and his eyes ominously bright, was steadily facing Latour, while the Frenchman addressed him in a loud and scornful tone, with a look of undisguised hostility, and in words which stung the young man like a lash. When the King left the room, Latour had stepped forward to follow him. Ellesdon had interposed, and by so doing had brought down this storm upon his head.

"So this is the gentleman who knew nothing, knew nothing of the movements of the King! He didn't believe the King to be in Dorsetshire—pledged his honour—his honour, I think—to that!"

"This isn't Dorsetshire," Johnny interposed, with a grin.

"Ah! there is Mr. Erle, the cousin, equally innocent and equally acute. Mr. Ellesdon has heard of his cousin's resemblance to King Charles, but he knows nothing about it. His honour, of course, is ready to support that too—"

"I never said so," Ellesdon broke in hotly.

"Oh, it was only on the point of geography that the gentleman's honour was pledged! What *finesse*! What

adroitness! What loyalty to a comrade, trying, like him, to serve the King!"

"I don't accept you for a comrade," cried Ellesdon.

"*Dieu merci!*" sneered Latour. "What a loss for me! When I make plans to serve a King, sir, I don't choose fools who bungle —"

"Take care!" Ellesdon's voice rang sharp and stern.

"Ah! does the word offend you? Take your choice, then, Mr. Ellesdon, between bungle and betray."

Ellesdon started forward, his hand on his sword-hilt. "No man," he cried, "shall use that word to me!"

The Frenchman did not flinch, but his hand went to his side, and he muttered a curse as he remembered that he had left his sword below. He threw back his head and faced his opponent.

"Give me a sword," he said, "if you've the courage to fight me. Or does Mr. Ellesdon prefer to fight with an unarmed man? Do you imagine, sir, because you lied to me one day, that you can presume to bully me the next?"

"By God, it's too much!" shouted Ellesdon, and thrusting back his sword into his sheath, he sprang forward, and with the heavy riding-glove which he carried he struck the Frenchman full across the face. Latour staggered back for a moment, half blinded, and a great red mark came out upon his cheek. The next moment Hugh and Johnny had thrown themselves between, and an imperious voice was calling Ellesdon from below.

"Go, go," cried Johnny, seizing his cousin's arm. "They're calling you. The King commands it. What good can you do him by quarrelling here?"

Ellesdon paused a moment, flushed and angry. He was half ashamed. The Frenchman had ceased to struggle against Hugh, who held him firmly by the arm, but his

eyes blazed fiercely, and his face, save for the red scar, was deadly white. Johnny dragged Ellesdon vigorously to the door.

"M. Latour will know where to find me. He can have any satisfaction that he wants," the young man added, as again a deep voice called him from below.

"Go, go," Johnny repeated. "Think of the King first, man; he is waiting for you." And with that argument he pushed his cousin from the room. Then, his back against the door, he turned round again, to Hugh.

"I think we owe M. Latour some apology, Hugh," he said slowly. And Hugh let go his hold of the Frenchman's arm.

Latour started forward. "I will have more than an apology," he said. His voice sounded even drier and harder than before; but he had regained his self-control.

Johnny shrugged his shoulders. "That's as you please," he answered. "But my cousin has a hot temper; and there was some provocation, you will admit."

The Frenchman did not condescend to argue. "Let me pass," he said peremptorily; and he made a gesture to wave Johnny aside.

But Johnny did not stir.

"Let me pass, sir," Latour repeated sternly.

For reply Johnny only glanced at Hugh, whose broad shoulders ranged themselves beside his own, making an effectual barrier against any egress from the room. But Johnny's voice was sweet as honey when he spoke.

"You won't blame us, M. Latour, if we keep you a moment. My cousin is not in a mood to hear reason just now."

M. Latour's fine manners failed under the strain. "Do you suppose I trouble myself about your trumpery cousin?" he cried rudely. "I have other things to think of and to

see to now. Let me pass at once, sir, at your peril! I insist; on the service of the King."

Johnny's expostulation was gentleness itself. "Forgive us, M. Latour. But the King's journey must be private. He wants no attendants but the two gentlemen he has chosen. He refused to take any others. You heard him yourself."

Latour measured the forces before him. Unarmed he knew that he was no match for two muscular boys. His face grew white again with anger, but with an effort he rallied his self-control.

"Mr. Erle," he said slowly and gravely, "I know you for a bold man already. But you take a heavy responsibility in detaining me. I came here this morning at the express desire of Lord Wilmot to arrange the details of the King's escape. It is imperative that I should return at once to Salisbury. I have the King's explicit instructions not to let this opportunity slip; and a few hours' delay at this juncture may make all the difference between failure and success—for him."

For an instant Johnny's eyes sought Hugh's. Hugh was still standing by the door, erect, impassive, silent; he had left to his friend all the talking; but not a word or a gesture of the Frenchman's had escaped his quiet watchfulness. And now, as Johnny hesitated for a moment, he saw something like a gleam of triumph shoot into the Frenchman's face, and in that instant his decision was made.

"I'm afraid we must take the risk, M. Latour," he said firmly. "We can't let any one follow the King."

"I'm not going to follow him, I tell you."

"No, I know," said Hugh. But he did not move from the door.

Latour's eyes flashed. "Call your father, sir," he cried

imperatively. "I will ask Colonel Wyndham if his ideas of hospitality allow him to keep a friend of King Charles a prisoner here."

"I'm sure," said Hugh with exasperating humour, "that my father's hospitality would not willingly let a friend of King Charles go."

The Frenchman lost his temper again. "I warn you," he cried, "that you will suffer, if you thwart me. Do you think I'll allow my plans to be frustrated by two miserable boys?"

"Not for a moment," said John. "But think, M. Latour, all we ask is that you should wait a few hours here, till the King is well away."

"And I refuse."

"If your business at Salisbury is imperative," Johnny persisted, "either of us could take a message for you there. Of course you would then give us your parole not to try to leave here before to-night."

"I refuse," snapped the Frenchman.

"Why not sit down and think it over?" Johnny urged blandly. And drawing a chair up to the table, he sat down.

Latour stood for a few minutes, buried in thought. Once his eyes turned to the windows, as if measuring the chances of a dash for freedom. But he saw that the boys' eyes followed his own. Once they wandered round the walls and lingered on the panels which sprang from floor to ceiling of the fine old room. Suddenly he moved to the table.

"Give me pen and paper," he said; "I will write a note. You say that you will take it to Salisbury, Mr. Erle?"

"I will, if you'll stay here till sunset," Johnny answered.

"No, Johnny, I'll take it," Hugh interposed.

"I prefer Mr. Erle for my messenger," said Latour bluntly.

"I am sorry for that," said Hugh, "for he can't be spared.

No, Johnny,"—in answer to a glance from his friend—"if any one goes to Salisbury, I go."

John said no more. It was characteristic of these two allies that they always played with perfect confidence into each other's hands, and that each relied upon the other to have a good reason for any course he took.

"Very well," said the Frenchman almost viciously. "You shall take my letter. Can I trust you not to read it on the way?"

"If you can't," said Hugh calmly, "it is needless to write."

Latour wrote a short note, sealed it, addressed it, and gave it to Hugh.

"It is not for Lord Wilmot," said Hugh, as he took it.

"No; you can read the address. Are you afraid to deliver it?" sneered Latour.

Hugh pocketed the note without more comment.

"I will do what I offered," he said.

"And meanwhile," said Johnny, "M. Latour will allow me to lock him in here. The windows are high, and will be closely guarded. I engage on my honour at sunset to open the door."

He smiled as he spoke. Latour said nothing.

"It is a room," Johnny added, with the air of a house-keeper showing a celebrated house, "which has been occupied by the highest in the land. I will see that food and drink are not forgotten. At worst it is only for a few hours. There are books to read there, and pens and paper, if you wish to write."

"No, I have written all I wish. You will take that letter at once, Mr. Wyndham," said Latour with his eyes fixed unpleasantly on Hugh.

"I will," said Hugh shortly; and Johnny led him out and locked the door.

"Now I'm off," said Hugh. "Keep your eye on him closely. I'll ask my father not to interfere."

"The Colonel will understand," said Johnny. "But, Hugh, tell me, why did you insist on taking that letter yourself?"

"Because, my lad, your wits are sharper, and your queer looks more likely to be useful to the King."

John stared.

"So, if either of us is to be netted," Hugh added, "it's better that you should be free."

"I don't half like it. Stop, Hugh," began Johnny. But Hugh was already down-stairs.

"Go to my uncle's to-night. I'll join you there to-morrow," Johnny shouted; and Hugh called back "All right!" as he made for the stable-yard.

Three hours later, having placed guards on the stairs and below the windows, having had a successful talk with Colonel Wyndham, who had demurred at first to such summary treatment of a guest, and having spent some time in discussing at dinner the possibility of anything happening to Hugh, Johnny marched up, key in hand, to Lady Wyndham's room, and opening the door, bade the man on guard there carry in some food. He stood in the doorway warily, as the man entered.

"M. Latour," he called, "I've brought you something. I hope you're really not uncomfortable here." But to these polite remarks the prisoner vouchsafed no reply.

Johnny entered, locked the door behind him, and walked round to the other side of the great bed. No one was there.

"Why," he began. Then turned in sudden alarm, and scanned every corner. Except himself and the servant, there was no one in the room. He rushed to the windows;

they were fast and the guards were below. He turned on the servant, then stopped as his eye caught the panel which communicated with the little secret room beyond. It had been pulled to, but had opened slightly. With a cry of anger, dismay and self-contempt commingled, Johnny dashed to the panel and flung it wide.

“What a fool! What an inconceivable fool I’ve been!” he muttered. “Why, I showed it him myself the other day.”

He was inside the little room in a moment, the servant standing in the opening, gazing after him, wide-mouthed. There could be no possibility of mistake. There were footmarks in the dust of the chimney. Latour’s ingenuity had discovered the passage which communicated with the brew-house below.

“Go down,” Johnny shouted to the man; “tell them to saddle me a horse at once in the stable. Stay! I’ve got the key; I’ll go myself.” And back across Lady Wyndham’s room, leaving the gaping servant there, and down the stairs in headlong bounds he went.

The Frenchman’s escape needed no explanation. Johnny’s deliberate candour, two or three weeks before, had supplied him with the clue, and Latour’s close observation, keen memory and quickness had enabled him to work out the details. While the family were quietly dining, and while all the spare men about the place were guarding the windows and the stairs, he had slipped out at the back, by the secret passage and through the brew-house without remark, and regaining his horse he had galloped away. Bitterly did Johnny reproach himself for his false confidence, for his lamentable mistake. But ten minutes later he too was galloping desperately along the Salisbury road, and even his poignant remorse was yielding to the power of the winds and the sunshine and the active pleasure of pursuit.

CHAPTER XIV

CROSS CURRENTS

BEFORE the sun had sunk behind the cedars, King Charles had come safely, though circuitously, to Heale. Avoiding the main roads as far as possible, and choosing lanes and byways which Colonel Phelips knew well, they rode through quiet villages, along unfrequented paths, past Sandford Orcas and North Cheriton to Mere, then on by Fonthill and by Wilton across the River Bourne to Lower Woodford, and then beside the banks of the Avon, till they saw the sun blazing, ere it vanished, in the windows of the West front of Heale house. Nothing occurred to alarm them save once, when crossing a highroad, they met a regiment of horse, and presently, behind it, no less a personage than General Desborough, Commander of the Parliamentary forces in the West, walking down a hill in company with three or four officers, engaged in talk. The General hardly cast a glance at the three riders who edged to the side to let him pass, and was far too busy in conversing with his subordinates to notice the smile which leaped to the groom's dark face, or the sudden anxiety in his companions' eyes.

“An omen,” said Charles, as the soldiers disappeared behind them; “an omen, Colonel! Our enemies are blinded. It is clear that I am not to be caught.”

The spirits of the little party rose at this escape. At Mere they found Miss Coningsby awaiting them. She had

ridden out from Heale, with one of the Wyndhams' grooms who was staying there with her, and the King now took the man's place as her attendant, while the man was sent back with reassuring messages to Trent. At Mere they dined, and the King was delighted to discover that the landlord of the inn was a Royalist at heart; for after sounding his dark-faced visitor with the favourite catch-word of the Cavaliers, "Are you a friend to Cæsar?" and receiving a laughing assent, he picked up a tankard and boldly called on him to drink King Charles' health.

At Heale Mrs. Hyde came out on the steps to receive them, and greatly to Phelps' annoyance, their arrival caused a considerable stir—so much so that even the maids in the back quarters ran to get a glimpse of their mistress' guests. Mrs. Hyde had not been told the secret. She only knew that a distressed Cavalier, a friend of her friends, needed her help. But with a shrewdness for which her friends had not bargained, she recognized Charles at once—she had seen him years before in Salisbury with his father—and as he dismounted she could not resist the impulse to carry his hand to her lips. Happily, Julia Coningsby, who was watching her face and saw her emotion, suddenly caught up her skirts in a whirl, and thus hid the rash action from the lookers-on. But Mrs. Hyde could not forbear leading Charles into the house herself, and all that evening she showed to the poorly dressed lad with the ill-cut hair and the ready wit an amount of attention, which puzzled those who were not in the secret and greatly embarrassed the rest.

"At supper," says the old narrative, "though His Majesty was set at the lower end of the table, yet the good gentlewoman had much ado to overcome herself and not to carve to him first. However, she could not refrain from

drinking to him in a glass of wine, and giving him two larks when others had but one."

Meanwhile at Salisbury events were moving fast. Wilmot was still hesitating between Latour's offer of a ship at Southampton, which fell in with his original idea, and the alternative, urged by Colonel Gunter and favoured by Dr. Henchman, of taking a vessel on the Sussex coast. Colonel Gunter had come to Salisbury to unfold his plans, and was hourly waiting for a letter to assure him that the small coal brig for which he had been negotiating through a merchant of Chichester, would be put at his service, as he had desired. Both Charles and Wilmot were anxious to be off; and wherever a vessel was first forthcoming, thither, it seemed probable, the King would decide to go.

Colonel Gunter, of Racton near Chichester, was a tall, spare man, with a lean and thoughtful face—a face now fuller of thought than ever, as he sat with Lord Wilmot in a room at the King's Arms Inn.

"This man Mansel, you can trust him?" Wilmot was asking.

"Perfectly; I've known him for years," said Gunter. "He's as loyal as you or I."

"And what about the master of the brig?"

"Tettersall? Well, he's only a plain seaman. But he seems to be a decent fellow, and Mansel says he would answer for him with his life. The vessel would do. She is seaworthy and sails fast."

"What did you tell him?"

"That I had two friends flying from arrest. I offered him sixty pounds if he'd set them safe in France. The man was willing enough. It's only a question whether he could be ready in time."

"When will you know for certain?"

"To-day, I hope. Mansel is to send word to me here."

"And where would he sail from?"

"Somewhere near Shoreham, probably—East of Chichester. Of course he would let me know."

"It's a long way, Gunter."

"Well, it is some way, of course."

"Southampton's much nearer, and every mile we travel adds to the risk."

"Yes. But I thought the scheme at Southampton had fallen through."

"So it has, but I've heard of another which promises well. There was a Frenchman here offering us a French ship yesterday. And if His Majesty likes the idea, I'm inclined to try that."

As Wilmot spoke a knock was heard, and a servant entered with a note for him.

"Why, it's the man himself," he cried, as he read it. "Show him in. Now, Gunter, you shall see what you think of this plan." The door opened again and admitted a dusty figure. "Colonel," Wilmot added, "let me introduce you to M. Latour."

Latour bowed and extended his hand. "My Lord —" he began.

"Hush! Didn't they tell you I am Mr. Barlow here?"

"To be sure, Mr. Barlow. I called at Mr. Coventry's to ask your whereabouts, and they sent me on here." Latour lowered his voice suddenly. "I have come straight from the King."

"From the King!" cried both gentlemen in surprise.

"From Trent House, where I saw His Majesty before he left this morning."

"Ah, he has left, then, with Phelps?" said Wilmot. But to Latour's annoyance, he said no more.

"Yes. I do not ask where he has gone. The King, my Lord, condescended to approve of my proposal."

"Oh, did he?" cried Wilmot. "—Of the Southampton plan?"

"Yes. I hear to-day that the ship's papers and arrangements are complete. The vessel, as I told you, is a French one. She sails for Havre in three days—on Thursday night. The Captain is well known to me, and he has definitely offered to take any friends whom I may bring. I have told him to be ready to receive us, and now my plans only await the pleasure of the King."

Gunter and Wilmot looked at each other.

"You take my breath away, M. Latour," said the latter. "I had no idea that your arrangements were so complete. It certainly seems to be an opportunity not to be missed. When would your man be ready, Gunter?"

"Oh, in a few days, I hope. I ought to hear to-night."

Wilmot nodded and paused for a moment, as if in thought. Then he threw back his head. "The King must decide," he said.

"His Majesty liked my plan," said Latour.

"I will take his commands as soon as possible," said Wilmot, "and let you both know his decision without delay."

His tone implied that the discussion was over. Gunter rose to go out, and they all moved to the door.

"You stay the night in Salisbury?" Wilmot asked the Colonel.

"Certainly," he answered; "I stay till I hear again from you."

Latour lingered a moment in the passage. "When may I wait upon His Majesty again?" he asked.

"Oh, I will let you know," Wilmot responded. "The

King naturally wishes his movements kept quiet. But you are staying here?"

Latour nodded and bowed himself away. Up-stairs, from the window of the room which he had taken, he watched Colonel Gunter's tall figure moving down the street, watched Wilmot go out and enter the Close in the other direction, and then with a smile of grim satisfaction turned away. Next he sat down and wrote a note or two, and changed his clothes, which still bore traces of his journey through the chimney into the brew-house at Trent. Presently he opened the door and moved down-stairs.

The shadows were gathering, and the passage was growing dark. He saw a man, a countryman, dusty with travel, come out of the hall, and he paused to watch him, standing, as chance would have it, just by the door of Colonel Gunter's room. The dusty messenger came up to him in the dusk.

"Colonel Gunter?" he said.

With only an instant's hesitation, Latour nodded. The man put a letter into his hand.

"From Mr. Mansel of Chichester," he said.

Again Latour nodded. "There is no reply," he said. And taking the letter—and the risk—he walked boldly into Gunter's empty room and shut the door.

When he came out again, the man had gone. In Latour's pocket was a note to this effect:—"All is settled. We can be ready by Tuesday of next week. F. Mansel." And on Latour's features was a still grimmer smile.

It was not yet dark when John Erle rode into Salisbury and alighted at his uncle's house. It was characteristic of the Canon that he asked no questions, but readily answered all that Johnny had to ask. Of Hugh, however, Johnny could learn nothing. He went out and called at Mr. Cov-

entry's, and visited the landlord of the King's Arms. Neither of them had seen anything of Mr. Wyndham. No more had the servants at Dr. Henchman's house. John could not see the doctor ; he was back from Heale, but a gentleman was with him ; the man nodded so mysteriously that Johnny ventured to ask nothing more. Where could Hugh be ? Where could Latour have sent him ? There was nothing for it but to go home and wait. And wait accordingly with ever increasing anxiety John did.

Later in the evening, Dr. Henchman came over to the Canon's, and Johnny poured out his tale to him.

The Prebendary was uneasy too. "Who is this man Latour ? Who is he ?" he kept asking. "What business has he with our secrets ? How do we know he's any better than a spy ? Yet Wilmot trusts him ; Coventry trusts him ; the King appears to trust him. You trust him—no, you don't ; you've more sense than the lot."

"I haven't the spirit to contradict you, Doctor," said Johnny with faint humour, "and I shan't have till I know what's happened to Hugh."

"I don't like it ; I don't like it at all," said the Doctor, and he bent his shaggy brows until they met. "And now Wilmot has just been with me, wanting to put the King into this Frenchmen's hands entirely, and all that he can tell me about him is that he knows far more of our doings than he ought."

"But you won't let the King trust him too far, sir ?"

"Not if I can prevent it, certainly. Not without a warning anyhow." Dr. Henchman was quite positive as to that.

When the Doctor left, Johnny accompanied him to the door. A shock-headed boy was prowling on the doorstep, and gazing at the knocker as if unable to decide whether it would be a liberty to make use of it or not.

"Well, my boy," said Johnny sharply. He mistrusted the urchins of the Salisbury streets.

"Be this Canon Erle's?" asked the boy.

"Yes. What do you want with it?"

"And be you a young gentleman, sir?"

Doctor Henchman laughed, and the boy audaciously winked up at him, as out of a dirty pocket he drew a dirty note.

"Why do you ask?" enquired John, not appreciating his humour.

"Because I was told to bring this letter to a young gentleman at Canon Erle's."

Johnny almost snatched the letter from his hand. "Come in," he said, and he drew them back into the hall. "It's from Hugh, Dr. Henchman. Where did you get this, boy?"

"A young gentleman dropped it from a window, and told me I'd be well paid if I brought it here."

Johnny thrust his hand into his pocket. "Where was the window?" he said.

"High up, at the soldiers' quarters. God bless your honour. I'll bring as many more of them as you like."

But Johnny was under the lamp in the hall reading Hugh's note.

"I'm here under arrest," it ran; "there's no charge stated, but they refuse to let me go. I delivered Latour's letter to Macy, and they stopped me at once. Take care."

"What do you make of it, Doctor?" asked Johnny, handing him the note.

"It looks like a piece of treachery," the Prebendary responded. "But of course," he added, "it might be that they suspect Latour, and are holding Hugh only till they can get at him."

"Hugh thinks it's treachery," said Johnny. "Meanwhile, what are we to do to get him out?"

"I'll write to one or two of the Justices about it. They can't keep him without a definite charge. We're not quite at the mercy of these soldiers yet. Meanwhile we'll see what explanation M. Latour can offer. It will have to be a good one if he wants us to trust him." And off to the King's Arms the Doctor hurried, with Johnny at his side.

Latour had visited Tom Trenchard's lodging, again without finding that gallant officer at home, and had left a somewhat peremptory summons for the young man to attend him immediately on his return. Later on that evening, while the Frenchman sat sipping a glass of excellent French claret at his inn, Mr. Trenchard was announced.

"At last!" said Latour. "I have been wondering when I should find you. I trust, my dear Trenchard, that you have something to report."

"I am sorry to have missed you," said Tom lamely.

"Yes, twice," said Latour. "I am a busy man, and I was sorry too. Now then to business. Sit down and take some claret. Let me see, you came to Salisbury to keep a close watch on our friend, Mr. Johnny Erle."

"Yes," said Tom feebly.

"Well?" M. Latour's eyebrows rose till the twisted ends at their corners almost touched his hair.

"Well," said Tom, "he has been in Salisbury, at his uncle's."

"You've seen much of him?"

"Not as much as I hoped to. I did call."

"Call!" Latour laughed contemptuously. "Your methods lack subtlety, my friend."

Tom flushed. "Anyway, I did my best, sir. Of course I wasn't trained to be a spy."

An ugly expression flitted over Latour's face. "Have you nothing more definite to tell me?" he asked curtly.

"Yes; I know Erle left Salisbury with Colonel Phelps and Ellesdon yesterday."

"Where for?"

"I didn't ask him."

Latour burst out laughing, and the young man flushed angrily again. "This kind of thing isn't work I care for," he began; but Latour interrupted him with a stern gesture.

"Unfortunately, my friend, we can't all do the work we care for; and I haven't yet had the pleasure of discovering what the work you care for is."

"I'd rather give it up," said Trenchard suddenly.

"And the reward too, would you? You found Miss Limbry, did you not, at Heale? I thought so. My dear Trenchard, if we want things, we must work to get them. Patience! Patience! Jacob, you remember, served seven years for Leah."

Tom's brows clouded. He could not follow M. Latour in his lighter vein.

"And I think there was a little disappointment when he won her. We'll hope you'll be more fortunate, my friend. So then, since yesterday you know nothing of Johnny Erle?"

"Yes, I do," said Tom. "I know where he is at this moment. I've just come from Heale."

Latour looked up in surprise. "So I supposed; but what has that to do with Erle?"

"Why, he's there; he arrived this afternoon."

"At Heale! Are you certain?"

"Rose told me so an hour ago. She saw him come."

Latour whistled. "That is curious. I apologize, my dear Trenchard, for your information is later than mine. Was he alone?"

"No ; Ellesdon came with him."

"Ellesdon !" Latour leaned forward.

"Yes, and Colonel Phelps. Miss Coningsby met them on the way."

The Frenchman stared, then with a laugh fell back into his chair and slapped his knee. "Good, good !" he cried. "Ellesdon and Phelps, and a dark young man like Johnny Erle ! Thank you, my dear Trenchard ; you've done well. I beg your pardon. That little piece of news is just what I most wanted, and worth some days of work to me."

It was Tom's turn to stare. Latour rose and laid a hand impressively upon his arm. "Go back to Heale and watch that young man closely. He is no more Johnny Erle than I"—Tom began to protest, but he quelled him. "I know what I am saying. I hope in a day or two, my friend, to charge you with that young man's capture ; and if you carry it through as I instruct you, you may ask your own reward. Meanwhile, don't let him leave Heale unnoticed ; stick to him ; and report to me constantly, constantly. Good-night."

"And these fools imagined," mused the Frenchman triumphantly—when young Trenchard, persuaded against his will that Charles might possibly be there, had left him to return to Heale—"that they could keep me in ignorance of the movements of the King ! They would use me without telling me their secrets ! They did not know—I did not know myself—the clues I had. Fate rewards the man who knows how to lay plans."

The night was soft for October. The wind sang softly in the ancient trees of Heale. And Julia Coningsby, sitting late beside her open window, wondered at the mysterious splendour of the stars. How beautiful the world was, and

how peaceful, and what a happy dwelling-place for those who loved ! What mattered even the fate of Kings and kingdoms beside the dear secret buried in her heart ? Yet she loved the King, and would die willingly to serve him ; at least she thought she could, though life would be very hard to part with now. But how differently, ah ! and how far more deeply she loved the tall, straight, fair-haired lad who had met her with the King that day, and who an hour ago, as she bade good-night to him, had looked into her eyes and held her hand in his ! What was that noise ? A man's step, surely. It could not be her lover's. She leaned out. No ; Ellesdon was no troubadour, to go serenading her about the grounds at night. She would not have loved him had he had so little sense. Yet it was a man's step, at the side of the house. Ah ! it had passed her window ! It was pausing further on, at the corner, under the rooms where the maid-servants slept. Pooh ! It was some of the men about the place, no doubt. She would not think of it. She rose and closed the casement.

As she did so, a sound stopped her. Some gravel was being thrown against a window pane at the end of the line of windows on that side. Again she heard it rattle, and again. Then a deep voice called gently, and a man's figure, finding a footing in the ivy that straggled thickly up the wall, raised itself in the shadow to the level of the rooms above. As his hand touched the sill, the window that he was assailing opened, and a girl's fair head peeped out.

Julia watched, half fascinated, half alarmed. Then anger took possession of her. How dared the man—some impudent stable-boy, no doubt—come round the house, forcing his way to the maids' windows at such an hour, in such a way, as this ? Her first impulse was to rouse the household ; her next to confront and overwhelm the intruder.

Then the tones of a girl's voice fell upon her ear, remonstrating, gently perhaps, but in genuine dismay.

"Tom, Tom! how could you?"

She could not distinguish the words of the man's answer, but his accents were not those of a stable hand. He was pleading some excuse, paltry, no doubt, but quite sufficient to justify him in the only quarter where he cared to be excused. The girl's gentle protests were evidently giving place to language gentler still. "How *can* women be so weak?" Julia asked herself sternly. "If a man has only sufficient effrontery, there's no outrage which a woman won't forgive."

The girl laughed softly, and the man drew her closer to him. Julia rose. "Whoever it is, I am bound to stop it. With the King here, we must run no risk of intruders; the girl deserves no pity, but I will save her from herself."

She threw a wrap round her, took up a light and opened her door. Inside the house everything was still. How loud the old clock ticked upon the landing! How the boards creaked in the passage, as she passed along. Counting the doors and measuring her distance, she laid her hand on the one she sought; then pushed it open gently and walked in. A cry followed, a murmur of voices, a brief scuffle of feet; and then in an instant the window was shut to, and Rose Limbry, startled but superbly beautiful, swept round to meet Miss Coningsby's indignant gaze.

"What does this mean, Rose?" asked Julia with withering clearness. "What were you doing at that window and who was with you there?"

The girl was facing her with scarlet cheeks and drooping eyes. Alarm had given place to shame.

"Answer me at once," urged Julia relentlessly. "Tell me the truth, or I go straight to Mrs. Hyde."

"Ah, no, no," said the girl; "you would not be so cruel!"

"Tell me the truth then. Who was it at your window?"

"It was the—the gentleman—who loves me," faltered Rose.

"The gentleman who loves you! What right have you, girl, to a gentleman's love?"

"Ah, but he does, he does," the girl persisted.

"Gentlemen don't love in that underhand fashion," asserted Julia broadly. "Or if they do, you may be certain that it means nothing but shame for you."

"There is no shame in it. He loves me; yes, he loves me. In a few days I shall be his wife." Rose's manner had lost its touch of defiance. She spoke with a proud, happy confidence, that impressed Miss Coningsby in spite of herself.

"That may be so," she found herself saying; "but"—she fell back on stronger ground again—"that is no excuse for mystery and deception, no excuse for allowing a man to visit you in this scandalous way in the dead of the night."

The charge went home. The girl's eyes drooped again; her red lip quivered. How beautiful she was, thought Julia. Was it any wonder that a man should love her well?

"What have you to say to that?" Julia's tone had unconsciously softened. The girl's beautiful eyes were swimming, as they rose again pitifully to hers.

"Nothing," she answered; "nothing. Indeed, I did not wish it, or expect it. I was startled, and then I saw who it was, and opened the window only to beg him to go. Indeed, indeed, he would not wish to shame me. He did not mean to stay. He had no thought of wrong."

"It may be so," said Julia again. "But even if I believe you, we can't expect Mrs. Hyde to accept so lame a tale."

"Oh, you won't tell her," cried the girl piteously. "She would send me away, and part us. You will not tell her?"

"I must," said Julia; but her voice wavered, and the girl clasped her hand.

"Oh, Miss Coningsby," she cried; "you won't be so cruel to me. I promise that this shall never happen again; and indeed I have done no wrong. You know, ah! you know what it is to be loved." She paused and gazed at her with a look which it was difficult to resist.

"I must think of what is right—of the safety of the house," said Julia vaguely; "yes, and of your safety too."

Rose threw back her head with a fine gesture. "I am absolutely safe," she said, "with Tom. You think because he came to-night and climbed to my window, and for once forgot appearances, like the boy he is, that I'm not safe with him, that I can't trust him! Ah, Miss Coningsby, you don't know him as I do. Of course he is young; so are we both; he is headstrong; young men are; and in rank he is far too good for me. But he loves me, I tell you he loves me, as purely as if I were the proudest lady of you all. Tom wouldn't hurt me. Why, you trust the man who loves you. Would anything shake your trust in him?"

"That," said Julia, "is quite different; Mr. Ellesdon would never behave so." Somehow she did not resent the comparison, and the sternness had gone out of her voice.

"I know," said the girl, with a winning humility. She had possessed herself of Miss Coningsby's hand altogether now, and Miss Coningsby did not draw it away. "Your love is happy and equal, and all the world is glad of it; I am only a serving-maid here——"

"You don't talk like one," said Julia hastily.

"But love is the same thing for all of us. If we love, we

must believe in it. You wouldn't take from me my belief in him?"

"He had no business to come," said Julia feebly, but she knew that the argument fell flat. "Are you sure he is gone?"

"Quite sure; and quite certain that he will never make that mistake again." Rose threw open the casement. "Look for yourself, Miss Coningsby," she said.

The moon had begun to show and the lawns were lighter, and the shadows darker under the cedar trees. Julia's eyes searched the ground and the thickets; no sign of the intruder was to be seen. She was drawing her head in again, when something arrested her attention. What was that, away to the right, under her own window? Surely a man's figure was standing out against the dark tree-trunk behind. She leaned forward and listened.

"Julia," a low voice was saying, "Julia, sweetheart, good-night."

She gasped. For her there was no mistaking those accents, even had not a pale ray suddenly betrayed the whisperer's face.

"Willie," she cried softly, "for shame! Go in, go in. Good-night."

Was there a smile in Rose's deep blue eyes as Miss Coningsby slammed the casement and hurriedly pulled the curtain across? Was there a broad patch of scarlet spreading over Miss Coningsby's face? With a sudden gesture the proud young lady drew the other girl to her, and kissed her on the brow. "You were right," she whispered; "it is the same thing for all of us. Only be true to yourself, and he will be true to you." And then with averted eyes and tingling cheeks she fled.

CHAPTER XV

MINE AND COUNTER-MINE

M. LATOUR had hardly parted from Tom Trenchard when Dr. Henchman, Lord Wilmot, and Johnny came to question him about Hugh. But the Frenchman's horror at the news of Hugh's detention was so emphatic that it convinced Lord Wilmot at once of his good faith.

"Why, I sent him with a note to Captain Macy, an officer with whom I had an engagement which Mr. Erle and Mr. Wyndham would not let me keep. It was a private matter purely. I have friends in both camps, you know."

"Yes, that is what makes us uneasy," Dr. Henchman drily interposed.

"But it is just what enables me to be of service to you," Latour responded with effect.

"That's true," said Wilmot.

"I can't understand Mr. Wyndham's detention," Latour went on. "It can of course have nothing to do with my letter—unless, indeed, I have fallen under the suspicion of the authorities here. That is quite possible, but that, gentlemen, would not condemn me in your eyes."

"Far from it," said Wilmot, laughing, "we're all in the same box there."

"I will go and see Captain Macy immediately and ascertain if anything can be done. It is not the first time Captain Macy has made a foolish mistake. I will own to you, Lord Wilmot, that I don't think this young gentleman—or Mr. Erle there either—has behaved very generously to

me. But I shall be delighted if I can convince them that I am glad to be of service to them both."

So in that encounter the Frenchman came off best. "The fellow's scored, positively scored, by his rascality," said John to Dr. Henchman. John was convinced that Latour was at the bottom of Hugh's arrest. "Lord Wilmot thinks more of him than ever."

"But I, on the contrary," the Doctor consoled him, "think if possible, less."

But when very early next morning news came that Latour had seen Captain Macy, and had secured Hugh's immediate release, on condition that he returned to Trent, even the Prebendary had to admit Latour's success. "He's got rid of one of us for the moment," said Johnny, not forgetting that Latour had intended him to stand in Hugh's shoes.

"Then take good care, my friend," Dr. Henchman responded, "that he doesn't find means to get rid of the other as well."

Latour had caused Hugh's capture by the simple expedient of begging Captain Macy to arrest him as soon as he appeared with his note; he had known that he could count on Hugh's honour to present it, and not to look at its contents. It had been the angry impulse of a moment, born of a desire to turn the tables on the two young men, who had dared to capture and imprison him. He attached no importance to Hugh's detention, though he was glad to have separated him from Johnny Erle. But he was now flying at much higher game. He had at last positive information as to Charles' hiding-place. Captain Macy, for whom he had waited till midnight, had been hard to convince and had refused to do anything that night. But he had promised to act as soon as Latour could assure him that he had really seen Charles himself, and had undertaken

to have a troop of horse in readiness, to start for Heale, the moment that he heard from him. So, confident of success, Latour rode off at dawn next day to reconnoitre, his spirits high at the prospect of adventure, his conscience quite untroubled by the black treachery he planned.

But he had not left the city a mile behind or travelled far into the misty morning, when his attention was arrested by the sound of a galloping horse, and he drew aside into the hedgerow to let the rider and his cloud of dust go by. As he did so, he caught sight suddenly of the rider's face, and shouted "Trenchard! Trenchard!" in a voice that drowned the clatter on the road. With an answering "Hullo!" the newcomer brought his horse to a standstill, and wheeling, rode back to join him, surprise and perspiration in his face.

"You here, sir!" he said. "I was coming to find you."

"Why, what's wrong?" asked Latour, quickly. Tom's trouble and agitation were clear.

"I rode off to tell you that the King of Scots has gone."

"Gone!" cried the Frenchman, in a voice that almost broke into a scream. "Gone where and when? Explain yourself. Be quick, sir. Don't stand gaping, but say what you mean."

Tom flushed a deeper red. "I mean that the party of which I spoke, left Heale House suddenly before daybreak to-day."

"Where have they gone?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You don't know! What were you there for?"

"I wasn't there at the moment. When I went round at daybreak they had gone."

"I don't believe it."

"The servants saw them. There's no doubt about it. I made all possible enquiries —"

"And discovered —?"

"Well, nothing more than that."

"Of course not," Latour sneered bitterly. "You fool! You egregious fool!"

"I did all I could. I came at once to tell you."

"To tell me! Yes, that all my plans were ruined by your unpardonable neglect. What do you imagine I sent you there for except to prevent such accidents as this?"

"You didn't tell me to keep watch all night."

"Tell you! Tell you! Are you a child that you need telling every detail?" Latour cursed his own folly in not giving more definite instructions, but he was far too angry to admit that he was in any way to blame himself. "Let me tell you, Mr. Trenchard, that this is not the first time that I've had to complain of your stupidity. If you can't serve me better than this, you may go whistling for employers, and I can tell you you'll have to whistle for rewards."

Tom's eyes glowed with anger, and a scowl spread over his face. "And let me tell you, Mr. Latour," he answered hotly, "that I'll not stand such language from any beggarly Frenchman in the world."

Latour's riding whip went up in the air with a threatening gesture, and for a long moment the two men's eyes met. Then with an effort the elder man controlled himself. As the boy's anger blazed higher, the Frenchman's subsided a little, and he began to face the situation and to realize that loss of temper would not remedy their mishap. "You had better take care, Mr. Trenchard," he said slowly, "we had better both take care of what we say. We shall not help matters by blustering or brawling here."

"I didn't begin the brawling," Tom retorted. The other's stinging words were still smarting in his ears.

Latour laughed harshly. "Well, if I was the first to

begin the quarrel, I will be the first to end it. The best thing you can do now is to help me in repairing your mistake. You will ride on, if you please, at once to Salisbury, and tell Macy to do nothing more until he hears from me. He will think I have fooled him again, but I can't help that. Tell him our plans have broken down for the moment. Happily, I have others which depend solely on myself, and in a day or two I shall have this runaway King once more in my hands. Go on, Mr. Trenchard; I won't keep you. I will ride to Heale now and see Mrs. Hyde, if possible, but I shall be back in Salisbury before noon."

Without a word, Tom wheeled his horse again, shook up his bridle, and vanished in the dust. He would do the fellow's bidding this once, he said to himself, his anger smouldering in him; but not even for Rose's sake would he stand such service long. Latour, regaining his composure slowly, underrating the effect of his sharp words upon a proud and sullen mind like Tom's, and already revolving fresh schemes to take the place of the old, rode on more deliberately to Heale. After all, he mused, though he had lost the clue for the moment, and disappointed Macy once again, the King could not be very far off. That day Wilmot was to see him somewhere and to lay before him Latour's proposal to use the French ship from Southampton to Havre—a nice little imaginary proposal well designed to tempt Charles to betray himself into its deviser's hands. It was tantalizing no doubt to have to postpone the decisive blow for the moment; but it could not be postponed for long; and the other plan was so ingenious that it would be a pleasure to see it all worked out. So it was with a bland smile and a re-established temper that M. Latour was able to greet Mrs. Hyde a little later in her white-panelled parlour at Heale.

Mrs. Hyde had Miss Coningsby with her, but was very glad to see M. Latour. Of her guests she had little to tell him. "Oh yes, Colonel Phelps and Mr. Ellesdon had been to see her. They had stayed the night and had left early that morning. Yes, quite ridiculously early. What a pity! They would have been so glad to meet M. Latour. Indeed she wondered M. Latour had not met them on the road. She fancied they were riding to Salisbury—was it not Salisbury, Juliana? She had such a wretched memory for names."

But it seemed that Miss Coningsby's memory was no better. She really could not remember what the plans of the two gentlemen had been. And then the conversation wandered off to other topics. Mrs. Hyde remembered that she had to thank M. Latour for sending her that pretty dairy-maid, and was so much amused at his interesting himself in such a matter, and so much obliged to him for all that he had done. Whereat Miss Julia Coningsby began to prick up her ears and to listen, and to ask herself what this mysterious French gentleman had to do with English serving-maids, and whether Rose Limbry's disturbing presence was altogether a coincidence at Heale. So that M. Latour when he returned to Salisbury, had done little by his visit, beyond sharpening afresh the suspicions of a keen-witted young lady who already distrusted him.

Meanwhile the King and his companions were spending the day upon the open downs, and Charles, with obstinate cheerfulness was counting and recounting the stones at Stonehenge, bent on proving the falseness of the saying that no man could reckon them twice over alike. At a conclave at Heale the night before, they had decided that Charles' arrival had been too widely known; that for safety's sake his party should ride off next morning before daybreak, as if

continuing on their way, and pass the day hiding in the hills ; and then that at evening Charles should return alone, be privately admitted, while the servants were at supper or sent out of the way, and conveyed by Mrs. Hyde and Miss Coningsby to the secret hiding-place, which Heale House, like Trent and many other old houses, possessed. This plan was carried out to the letter. Very early in the morning Phelps and Ellesdon and their dark-faced groom rode off, taking care that their departure should be noticed by the household ; and that night, after dark, Charles was brought back safely to a private door, and smuggled in to his new hiding-place by the two ladies, who alone knew the secret, and who alone waited on and tended him during the days that he remained at Heale.

From morning till evening of that day, however, Charles and his little party were out on Salisbury Plain, and Charles “after being cooped up” as he said, “in every manner of hole for weeks together,” was delighted to have a day of fresh air and idleness to spend in the cool beauty of the downs. About the time that M. Latour was leaving Heale, they were joined at Stonehenge by Lord Wilmot, with Dr. Henchman and Colonel Gunter in his train, who had ridden out to take the King’s decision on the alternative schemes suggested for his escape. Charles laughingly declared that he would hold a council “among the altars of his ancestors” forthwith ; and there, in the circle of great stones, Wilmot and Gunter stood, unfolding their proposals, while the King sat on the short turf and listened, and overhead, chased by the breezes, the white clouds sailed across a deep blue sky.

“I thank you, Colonel,” said the King, as Gunter ended. “Your plan is like the head that framed it, both courageous and clever. But the preparations, I understand, are not quite complete ?”

"Well, I ought to hear from Mr. Mansel to-day, sir! I hoped to have heard before this."

"I know that I could have no better guidance, and I will keep your proposal in mind. Meanwhile, I am drawn to the Southampton project, and I think Lord Wilmot inclines to recommend that too."

"I can't help feeling that Southampton is much nearer, sir," said Wilmot; "and the ship, it seems, can be ready at once."

"Exactly," said Charles; "those are strong points, and that Frenchman you sent me——"

"M. Latour, sir."

"Latour! I thought his plans very complete."

"No doubt, sir, if you can trust him," said Dr. Henchman impressively, as Charles' eyes wandered round the circle and rested on him.

"Why not?" asked the King.

"We know nothing of him, sir."

"He'd very good introductions from Paris," put in Wilmot.

"So he said," the Doctor added.

"Well, he showed them," said Wilmot.

"He seemed to me to know all our friends there," Charles remarked.

"Oh, I admit that he knows all about us, sir," the Prebendary responded. "But the question to my mind is what do we really know of him?"

"What do you say, Wilmot?" asked the King.

"I'm bound to say I don't share Dr. Henchman's suspicions," Wilmot answered. "It's true that I know little of M. Latour beyond what I have seen myself. But, perilous as it may be, sir, we are obliged to rely on such help as we can get, and I've no reason to suppose that his offers of as-

sistance, which are valuable and timely, are treacherous and false."

"What's your opinion of them, Doctor?" said the King.

"I should like to test them before I give one, sir," Dr. Henchman answered grimly. "In any case Your Majesty would doubtless send some one whom you could rely on to Southampton, to see the ship which this French gentleman speaks of, and to verify the Captain's offer on the spot."

"Yes, we should do that, Wilmot, I think," said Charles.

"Certainly, certainly, sir," assented Wilmot.

"And then, if all seems satisfactory, and you allow it, Doctor," the King added, "we'll take the Frenchman's offer and the risk as well. Now, whom shall we send to Southampton? No, Wilmot, not you."

"If I might suggest, sir, Mr. Ellesdon knows more than most of us," said Dr. Henchman, "of the shipping on the Southern coast."

"To be sure, to be sure," said the King, kindly, taking no notice of Wilmot's half-uttered protest, but turning towards Ellesdon, who was waiting behind. "He knows what slippery customers these skippers are—eh, Ellesdon? What do you say? Will you go to Southampton, and see if we can make up for our mishap at Lyme?"

"If Your Majesty will only give me the chance," said the young man, flushing proudly.

"Then that's settled. The sooner you go the better. You will report as early as possible to us. And you, Wilmot, will explain matters to Latour." And springing to his feet, Charles intimated that the discussion was at an end.

Within half an hour, leaving the King with Phelps and Gunter, Ellesdon was riding to Salisbury with Lord Wilmot and Dr. Henchman at his side. He stayed there only to call in at Canon Erle's and to tell Johnny of his plans, and

then after a few hasty preparations he started off on his long ride towards the coast. Sharing to the full Dr. Henchman's suspicions, he was determined to be independent of Latour, and to make his own enquiries for himself. But Wilmot had undertaken to tell Latour of his mission, so that the Frenchman might join him at Southampton, if he thought fit. Wilmot was still a little distrustful of Ellesdon. He wanted him to consult with Latour before he started, and suggested that Latour might like to travel with him. But to neither proposal did Ellesdon show any disposition to assent. He had the name of the ship's Captain, which Latour had mentioned to Wilmot. He knew that the vessel was a French vessel, bound for Havre. And with these particulars, and his shipping friends in Southampton, he knew quite enough to find her, if indeed—as in the depths of his own mind, he doubted—such a ship and such a Captain were in port at all.

"Now, Johnny," he said to his cousin at parting, "if I'm not back here at latest by to-morrow night, you'll know that there's been foul play somewhere, and you'll stop that Frenchman's game."

"I promise," said Johnny. "If need be, I'll go straight to the King."

"And Julia ——"

"Will refuse, I'm afraid, to take me as a substitute. But I'll see to her, and we'll have you back, no fear."

Was it "Julia, Julia" that the birds were piping, that the wind in the trees was whispering that afternoon? Ah, how different, thought Ellesdon, was that ride from Salisbury from the ride which he had taken in Miss Coningsby's company the day before! Yet the sky was as clear, the air as crisp and bracing, the turf by the road as soft and springy as a man could ask, and his horse's pace was surely sufficient

to shake the cobwebs even from a lover's brain. On he rode, where the white curves led him, past farm and cottage, mellowed walls and scented hedgerows, past gables buried in thatch and gardens gay yet with autumnal flowers, by Alderbury, White Parish and Sherfield English, to Romsey lying low beside its river, under the shelter of its noble church. After Romsey he turned more to the South, and leaving the glades of the great Forest on his right, he followed the river that wanders through those flat lands towards the sea ; and so good a pace did he keep, that the night was still young and the ale-houses well tenanted, when he found the lights of Southampton winking at him cheerily on either side. Stabling his tired horse at an inn, and hardly waiting to order the supper which his empty stomach longed for, Ellesdon made his way on foot to the deserted quay.

But neither that night nor the following morning, though he prolonged his researches late and recommenced them very early, could he find a trace of Captain Jean Duval—the name mentioned to Lord Wilmot by Latour—or of a French vessel bound for Havre. Ellesdon spared no pains ; he knew the port authorities ; he had plenty of acquaintances among the sea-faring people whom he met. But hour by hour the conviction grew upon him that no such ship and no such skipper were to be found ; that no such things existed, he swore to himself with ever-deepening anger, except in the treacherous imagination of M. Latour. Persuaded at last that he was only wasting his time on a fool's errand, he abandoned the search and determined to ride back without further delay, to denounce Latour as an impostor, and to carry the result of his investigations directly to the King.

Dust, haste, and disgust may perhaps have blinded his

vision, or the byways of Southampton may in those days have been needlessly obscure ; but whatever the cause, Ellesdon failed to notice a small and wiry figure on a small and wiry horse, who had been observing his movements all the morning, and who slipped out and followed him as he left the town. As he rode on, this figure tracked him closely, though keeping as far as possible out of sight. But as Ellesdon drew near Romsey, the small horse was spurred forward, and passed him at a gallop on the road. When he entered the town, the small wiry man was colloquing with a couple of troopers in the street, and as he went by, they all closed in and followed him towards the market-place. There, as he turned the corner, he found a troop of horse awaiting him ; and Tom Trenchard rode forward to meet him with a paper in his hand.

“ Mr. Ellesdon,” he said, “ William Ellesdon.”

“ That’s my name,” said Ellesdon, his tone curt and his eyebrows lifted high.

“ I have a warrant for your arrest,” said Tom, displaying the paper.

“ For my arrest ! On what grounds ? ”

“ On a charge of harbouring the enemies of the Commonwealth. It is all in order, as you can see.”

“ Who laid the charge ? ” asked Ellesdon hotly, waving the warrant aside.

“ Not I,” said Tom involuntarily, answering the question in his eyes.

“ Who else knew ? ” said Ellesdon, half to himself. “ Ah, I told Latour, I remember.”

“ It does not do,” said Tom, drily, “ to tell one’s secrets to any gentleman one meets.”

“ You’re wrong, sir ; gentlemen don’t betray one. It’s only curs like the Frenchman whom you serve do that.”

Tom kept his temper, though he winced sharply at the taunt.

“I’m here by order of Captain Macy, my superior officer,” he answered not without dignity; and Ellesdon looked at him a little bit ashamed.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Trenchard. I spoke under provocation, but I’ve been abominably used. I give you my word of honour I’ll surrender in Salisbury to-night.” He pushed his horse forward, but Trenchard interposed.

“No, no, Mr. Ellesdon; my orders are imperative. You must surrender here.”

“But I must get to Salisbury to-night, I tell you,” cried the other fiercely. He thought of the King anxiously waiting, of Latour treacherously scheming, of all that depended on his letting his friends know the truth.

Trenchard shook his head doggedly. “It can’t be, I’m afraid,” he said.

For an instant Ellesdon gripped his riding whip and glanced round the market-place, meditating a dash. But the troopers had now closed round him. The roadway in front was densely blocked. Common sense told him he had no chance of getting through them, and that he would gain more by relying on the evident good nature of his captor. He edged back a little, keeping his elbow clear, and at a touch of his spur his horse began to plunge.

“Mr. Trenchard,” he cried in a clear voice, “if I surrender quietly——” and his tone and attitude added plainly, “it will give you some trouble to capture me, if you refuse my terms”—“will you promise to send a message for me to my friends?”

Tom hesitated. He did not like his job; he half distrusted his employer; he had no enmity towards Ellesdon, who had kept his secret and Rose Limbry’s well. Ellesdon

saw his advantage and leaning forward, added in a lower tone,

“I appeal to you, Trenchard, as a man of honour. My honour will suffer if you refuse. There is some one at Heale—a woman——”

Tom crimsoned, and a shy smile broke over his stolid face.

“More than one, eh? I heard so. Well, you wouldn’t disappoint your friend there. Let me send this message to the girl who is expecting me.” And Ellesdon tucked his riding-whip under his arm, and wrote a hurried line to Miss Coningsby upon a scrap of paper, and handed it across to Tom.

“You must not tell her where you are,” said Tom.

“Very well,” Ellesdon answered. “There it is. We can trust each other. I won’t seal it up.”

“No, but I will,” said Tom, as he took it, “and I’ll see that she gets it to-night.”

Ellesdon’s horse was quite quiet by this time, but not quieter than his master, as he obediently followed Tom Trenchard into the stable-yard of an adjoining inn. And the little wiry man was forthwith despatched upon an errand for which Latour had never intended him, when he sent him off to track and entrap Ellesdon the day before. That evening Miss Coningsby, counting the hours at Heale until her lover should return to her, received instead a little missive, scribbled on the back of one of her own letters, and fastened up in a great envelope with a seal she did not know, “left by a man without a name,” the servant told her, “who rode off at once without waiting for reply.” She read it at a glance.

“*Trapped by Latour. His story false. Let no one trust him.* W. E.”

"Oh, Willie, Willie," she said with a low cry; then she straightened herself and confronted the servant. "It is all right," she added untruly, and promptly hurried off to Mrs. Hyde.

Latour had been taken aback by the King's decision to send Ellesdon to Southampton to verify the existence of the ship. But like a great campaigner he faced the difficulty bravely, and made fresh plans to meet it, even while he talked.

"I am glad, my Lord," he said to Wilmot, who came to tell him of Ellesdon's start, "that His Majesty has decided to verify my story. It is only natural and right."

"It is only a precaution, I am sure," said Wilmot courteously. "The King was as pleased with your proposal as I was, but there can be no harm in making certain of details."

"Quite the contrary," said the Frenchman smoothly. "I am delighted that Mr. Ellesdon should make enquiries at Southampton. I shall leave him absolutely free in the matter;—no, I shall not go there. You say he knows the name of the Captain of the ship?"

"Yes, I told him. You mentioned it to me."

"Did I?" said Latour; it pleased his cynical humour to think of Ellesdon wandering round Southampton, seeking the imaginary Captain of a non-existing ship. "Then, Mr. Ellesdon will have no difficulty at all in finding him. He will report, no doubt, directly to the King."

"No, to me," said Wilmot, "to-morrow."

"Ah! And if he failed to report, I trust the King would not abandon the plan."

"How could he fail?"

"Oh, he won't fail to find the ship; Duval may be relied on. I was only thinking —" Latour paused, then went

slowly on. "Lord Wilmot, you know very little of me. You have trusted me most generously. I think you believe in my devotion to the King?"

"Entirely, M. Latour."

"Then let me say to you in confidence, though I speak at the risk of offending, that I have never been quite satisfied that Mr. Ellesdon —" he paused again.

"Speak out."

"Is sincerely devoted to our cause."

"Why, I never heard it questioned," said Wilmot with a start.

"There was that mishap at Charmouth," said the Frenchman reflectively.

"Yes. But that was accounted for." But even with Wilmot the recollection rankled still.

"Was it? You know best; but it puzzled me, I confess. Then it was immediately followed at Bridport by the denunciation of the King. Who told the troops?"

"Some ostler, wasn't it?"

"Was it? I don't know. But I do know that I saw Mr. Ellesdon ride into Bridport beside one of the Justices who tried the case. He is intimate with the Parliamentary authorities. He lives in a town that is full of Roundheads. Here in Salisbury I have seen him talking deeply with young Trenchard, who has a commission in Cromwell's army, and I don't think he was pleased to be observed —"

"The Trenchards are all rebels," Wilmot muttered.

"Yes; and so, I have sometimes thought, are many of Mr. Ellesdon's friends."

"No, no; the Erles are all right, and Dr. Henchman —"

"Oh, of course, of course; and with young men like Hugh Wyndham and John Erle he is very popular. But

boys are not easily suspicious, and not always absolutely wise. Now I am no boy, and years have made me cautious. Why, I ask, is Mr. Ellesdon so determined to get the King's escape arranged through him? Why did the Charmouth journey nearly end in the King's capture? Why did he insist on going to Southampton to-day alone?"

"It is true, he did," Wilmot reflected. How ugly facts looked, he was thinking, when presented in the worst light like this! "But it's too horrible," he broke out; "I can't believe it. What motive could Ellesdon have for such treachery as that?"

"Ah, that is the point," said the Frenchman impressively; "I fear it is the old, old story—the needy gentleman and the heavy reward. I know—I say I know for certain—that Ellesdon is overwhelmed by debts."

Wilmot pushed back his chair and walked to the window, his brow knotted, a look of deep pain in his eyes. "M. Latour," he said, as he came back to the table, "you have made a terrible suggestion. I won't accept it. I cannot believe it. I have always thought Mr. Ellesdon an honourable gentleman, and had he been anything else, he could have ruined us ere this."

Latour recognized his weak point at once. "That I have always felt to be the strongest argument in his favour," he answered instantly. "And I readily admit I may be wrong. Heaven knows, I would rather have cut my tongue out than have said all this, Lord Wilmot, even now, had not the suspicion been steadily growing on me, and had not interests hung upon it compared with which even a gentleman's life and honour are but as a feather in the scale."

He spoke with a fine air of earnestness, and Wilmot was obviously troubled and impressed.

“What I have said to you to-day, Lord Wilmot, I never before breathed to any living soul. It is not a pleasant task to me to suggest these horrible suspicions against a man who has been thought beyond reproach. But”—he raised his hand in the air and his voice vibrated deeply—“with me, my Lord, the King comes first! If Mr. Ellesdon returns to-morrow and reports all well, believe him; but watch him as I shall, all the same. But if he does not come, I say, if he does not come, save the King without him, for it means that he has played us false.”

Wilmot went back to his lodging—he was staying again at Mr. Coventry’s—with clouded brows and with a heavy heart. He would not believe Latour; no, he would not believe him. And yet, insidiously, the poison worked.

And Latour spent an hour with Captain Macy that afternoon which sent him home with a contented face. Captain Macy had been annoyed at the fiasco of the morning and was inclined to be critical and to sneer. He piqued Latour by asking him why, if he was so certain to have the King in his hands in a day or two, he could not tell him where he was just now; and he alarmed him a little by assuring him that the authorities had positive information that the King had found his way to London in disguise.

“Then why don’t they lay their hands upon him?” retorted Latour contemptuously.

“Ah, my friend, that’s just what I was saying to you.”

However, Captain Macy undertook obligingly to effect Mr. Ellesdon’s arrest on his way home, and a wiry man on a wiry horse was despatched immediately, to report Ellesdon’s movements to the troops.

“That’s the second man this week that we’ve arrested for you,” said Macy. “We packed that young Wyndham home to-day.”

“Ah, the third will be better worth having,” said Latour. “I won’t disappoint you and your men again. By the way”—he took a paper from his pocket—“you remember that little note you signed for me?”

“Yes, isn’t it enough?” asked Macy bluntly. It was a promise signed by Desborough and Macy to pay two thousand pounds for the delivery of the King, which M. Latour had secured some little while before.

“Oh, quite, quite; it is not that. But would you oblige me by writing Ellesdon’s name on the outside?”

“It’s a queer thing to do,” said Macy. “The paper was meant for you.”

“But you’d be willing—the Government would—to pay that sum to Mr. Ellesdon, if he gave up the Scots’ King, I suppose?”

“Oh, I suppose so. But all men don’t do that sort of thing.”

Latour winced, but he answered quite suavely, “I think it’s worth trying, if you want to secure the prize.”

“Oh well, if you like. There’s no harm in trying him;” and Captain Macy wrote Ellesdon’s name outside the note.

M. Latour had still a little work to do before the day was over, and to judge by his contentment in the evening he carried that through as successfully as the rest. Then, the next day he waited in patience, till the news of Ellesdon’s capture arrived. As soon as he got it, he sent over to beg Lord Wilmot for an interview, and despatched an urgent note to Johnny Erle, enquiring if Ellesdon had appeared yet, and begging to hear as soon as he returned. And Johnny, distrusting him deeply, had to answer with all the politeness that he could, and to wait with growing impatience, as the evening slipped by into the night. At last, at eleven o’clock, he could stand it no longer, and after a hur-

ried visit to Dr. Henchman, whom he found talking with Colonel Gunter at his house in the Close, he saddled his own horse in the stable, and rode off at a reckless pace to Heale.

The house was dark, but a light shone in one of the windows, and a casement opened, as Johnny rattled up.

“Oh, Johnny, Johnny,” said Miss Coningsby’s voice. “Is that you? I’ll come down to you. We wanted you so!”

CHAPTER XVI

SCRAPS OF PAPER

LONG and late sat Johnny in Mrs. Hyde's white-panelled parlour, talking earnestly with Juliana Coningsby, debating the best means of rescuing Ellesdon and of foiling the treacherous schemes of M. Latour.

"We must see the King," Johnny persisted.

"He is asleep," said Julia. "Mrs. Hyde won't let us disturb him. She is watching now."

"She and you are the only ones in the house who know of his presence?" Julia nodded. "It's the only safe plan," Johnny added. "Yet it was all Dr. Henchman could do to prevent Lord Wilmot from telling Latour where he was."

"He would never have told him, surely."

"He would, I think, if he had not promised Dr. Henchman. Latour, of course, pressed for it, and Wilmot has complete confidence in him."

"And the King has complete confidence in Lord Wilmot."

"More's the pity," said John. "Julia, you'll have to show that note of Willie's to the King."

"Trust me," Julia answered; her spirits were rising; "and if that fails to enlighten him, I've something else in reserve."

The door opened, and Mrs. Hyde glided into the room. Anxiety had left its traces even on the handsome widow's face. "Julia," she asked, "are you ready?"

Miss Coningsby rose at once. "Of course," she said.

"Now we have Johnny to reinforce us, you must go and get a good night's rest."

"Well, I'll see," said Mrs. Hyde. "He's sleeping beautifully."

"Of course he is," said Julia, "like a baby. I only wish that you slept half as well." Miss Coningsby's strong sense did not forget that the persecuted monarch was after all a very hale young man.

"My dear, what does it matter?" said Mrs. Hyde simply.

"A great deal, to me," said Julia. "You won't mind my waking him up?"

"Oh, Julia, you wouldn't do that."

"I shall, if he doesn't wake soon, for I want to talk to him."

"My dear Juliana!"

"And I shall do it at once, if he snores."

Miss Coningsby moved towards the door. But ere she reached it, the sound of horses' hoofs was heard upon the gravel outside. Johnny sprang up, and the little party listened intently as the horses stopped, and some one, dismounting, knocked gently on the heavy oaken door.

"No, those aren't troops," said Miss Coningsby, turning with a smile of relief. Then the tones of a deep voice reached them.

"That's Dr. Henchman's voice," said Johnny; "it's all right;" and, seizing a candle he moved across the dark hall to the door. A minute later Lord Wilmot, Dr. Henchman, Colonel Phelps and Colonel Gunter were standing by the parlour fire.

"We have come," said Wilmot to Mrs. Hyde, with his courtierlike manner, "to see His Majesty the King."

"But he's asleep," said Mrs. Hyde, as if that disposed of the question.

"I fear we must rouse him," said Wilmot; "we have grave news to communicate and a grave decision to take."

"Have you news from Mr. Ellesdon, Lord Wilmot?" asked Miss Coningsby quickly.

Wilmot's eyes sought Phelps', but—Julia thought—avoided hers. "We have news of him," he answered, hesitatingly. "But we must keep that for the King."

"You know he is trapped"—began Julia. Then something in Wilmot's face stopped her, and she turned suddenly to the door. "Mrs. Hyde," she said, "I will go and rouse the King. Will you bring these gentlemen up to your room, and we can talk there. It adjoins the King's hiding-place," she added, for the others—"and one window commands the porch."

The others fell in at once with her suggestions, and Miss Coningsby led the way up-stairs. "Johnny," she called as she passed through the hall; and John, taking a candle, accompanied her closely up the staircase, Mrs. Hyde and the four men following behind. "Johnny," the girl whispered, "keep close; I'm sure something has happened;" and then advancing into a spacious bedroom, she tapped steadily on a panel in the wall.

As at Trent, the hiding-place occupied by the King, and designed originally for fugitive priests in the days of Tudor proscriptions, opened out of the principal bed-chamber, which was usually occupied by the mistress of the house. A panel at the side of the fireplace formed the entrance to the little secret room, and a small stair in the recesses of the chimney provided a means of escape in case of need. Miss Coningsby's gentle knocking was soon answered by a sleepy voice. Then, as she opened the panel slightly and spoke through it, the sleepy voice grew wakeful and alert.

"Wilmot," it said, as Miss Coningsby repeated the names

of the visitors, "and Phelps? Yes; wait; I will come." And after a moment's delay, the panel swung back on its hinges, and Charles, almost fully dressed—for he slept ready for all emergencies—but with his short hair ruffled and his dark eyes blinking at the light, appeared, sleepy but collected, in the entrance, and with a slight nod returned the gentlemen's salutes.

"Well, what is it, Wilmot?" he asked.

Wilmot stepped forward. "It grieves us to disturb you, sir," he said. "But we have news that won't bear delay."

"I could wish it had kept till to-morrow," said the King with a laugh. "Give me a chair. Now then, let me hear what it is."

"Your Majesty sent Mr. Ellesdon yesterday," began Wilmot, "to make enquiries at Southampton about a French ship bound for Havre ——"

"Yes. Well, what does he report?"

"Mr. Ellesdon has not come back, sir."

"Not yet?"

"He's been stopped on the way, sir," Miss Coningsby interposed. But the King silenced her with a gesture. "I will hear Lord Wilmot first," he said; and Julia drew back.

"I have waited all day for Mr. Ellesdon," Wilmot went on, "but only to-night did any news of him reach me, and it is news which it pains me to bring here. Your Majesty will remember our misadventure with Mr. Ellesdon's ship at Lyme. I have serious grounds for fearing"—Wilmot paused, then added firmly—"that Mr. Ellesdon is a gentleman on whom it is unsafe to rely."

An angry exclamation rose to Julia's lips, but Charles' eye was on her, and she restrained herself again.

"That is a very grave charge, Lord Wilmot," the King

said slowly. "Mr. Ellesdon is a gentleman whom we all hold in honour and respect."

"So did I, sir, but Your Majesty will allow me to tell you what has changed my views."

"Go on," said the King, and he looked round the little circle. Julia's eyes were glowing with resentment. Only Dr. Henchman's hand upon his shoulder restrained Johnny Erle from breaking out. "We will hear Lord Wilmot's story first," the King added, "and then we will consider any explanations there may be."

"Mr. Ellesdon left yesterday for Southampton," Wilmot continued. "He insisted on traveling alone. My information is that he reached the port safely, discovered the ship he was seeking, and had an interview with the Captain, Jean Duval. He found that all the arrangements were made as M. Latour had told us, and that the Captain was willing to convey three passengers to Havre. And he promised to conduct Your Majesty to Southampton and to deliver you to Captain Duval to-morrow night."

Wilmot paused. "Well, that is all satisfactory, very satisfactory," said the King.

"Yes, but Mr. Ellesdon added this condition," Wilmot went on, with a certain increasing distinctness, his eyes fixed closely on the King. "He offered to do this only on condition that Captain Duval undertook to put at once to sea, and to hand over his passengers the same night to a vessel of his own which should be waiting in the Solent, and ready to relieve him of his guests."

"What for?" asked Charles quickly.

"That Mr. Ellesdon might have the credit of capturing Your Majesty at sea, and the profit of handing him over to the rebel Government for a munificent reward."

A gasp of astonishment, indignation, anger, ran through

the little company gathered round the King. Miss Coningsby grew pale, and Johnny crimson, as Dr. Henchman gripped his shoulder with a grasp of iron. With unaccustomed dignity Mrs. Hyde stepped forward.

“It can’t be true, Your Majesty,” she said.

Charles’ face was grave and watchful, and there was a touch of hardness in his eyes. But his voice was quiet and low.

“What are your proofs, my Lord?” he asked.

“I have seen the man, sir.”

“Whom? Ellesdon?”

“No; Duval, the Captain of the ship.”

“Here, to-day?”

“Yes, he reached Salisbury to-night. Latour brought him at once to me.”

“Latour again!” said Dr. Henchman grimly.

“Phelips was with me. He saw the man as well.”

“And he told you this strange story?” asked the King.

“Not only that, sir. He told me that Ellesdon had offered him two hundred pounds to carry out the plot. He showed me the earnest-money—twenty pounds—which Ellesdon had put into his hands.”

“And where is Mr. Ellesdon now?”

“In irons, sir, on Duval’s vessel in Southampton port; and the honest fellow has ridden here to warn us, and to place his ship at your disposal if you will consent to trust yourself to him.”

“And to his master, M. Latour,” Dr. Henchman added from behind.

“You saw this man too, Phelips?” asked the King.

“I did, sir. I did not know how to believe his story. Yet——” Phelips paused in his perplexity.

“ You do believe it ? ”

“ I don’t know what to say, sir.”

“ You think it may be true ? ”

“ It sounded like the truth, sir,” said poor Phelps in distress. A bitter little laugh broke from Miss Coningsby’s lips. Charles turned towards her.

“ You think it sounds false, my friend ? ” he said, very gently.

“ Sounds ! ” cried the girl, her eyes flashing, and immeasurable scorn in her voice. “ Can Your Majesty doubt for a moment that it is all an infamous lie ? ”

“ I have not finished, sir,” said Wilmot.

“ No, but you have said enough, my Lord, to calumniate the absent, and I ask for leave to reply.” Miss Coningsby swept forward and stood by the King’s chair, her right hand clenched, her pale face shining, her beautiful features alive with passionate scorn, and her voice, halting at first, and half choked with excitement, ringing out clear and arresting, as her eloquence carried her along. “ You have news, you say, of Mr. Ellesdon, news which would shut him out forever from the company of honourable men, news which would brand his name with infamy wherever truth and loyalty are loved ! Where does it come from, this news which is to ruin an honest gentleman, who has served the King as faithfully as you ? From a nameless stranger, whom you never saw until an hour ago ! Who brought this stranger to you ? Another unknown foreigner, almost as strange as he ? What has Latour done that his word is to be taken as gospel ? What proof has Latour to offer that this whole story is not an infamous conspiracy to dispose of a man who cannot be suborned ? Answer me, my Lord, if there be any answer. Who is this Frenchman with his unknown agents, that his word is to weigh against an Englishman

whom we all know to be the soul of honour, and whom I am not ashamed to say I trust—and love."

The girl's voice broke as she uttered the last words slowly, proudly, and Mrs. Hyde ran to her side, and clasped her hand. Wilmot listened, his head bowed before her, visibly pained and affected, but his judgment unmoved.

"It is right and natural that Miss Coningsby should resent the charge," he said. "She has implicit faith in the gentleman she names."

"As you, my Lord," Dr. Henchman interposed roughly, "have implicit faith, it seems, in this Latour."

"It isn't faith only," cried Julia, "I have proofs to support it. I too have news of Mr. Ellesdon. See, Your Majesty, I got this note from him to-night."

There was a movement of surprise, as Charles took the note. "From the man himself!" he said. "Why, that's better than a sailor's story." Then he read it aloud.

"*Trapped by Latour. His story false. Let no one trust him. W. E.*'"

"Where was that note written, sir?" asked Wilmot.

"There is no place named," said Charles.

"May I ask who brought it?"

Julia looked at Johnny. "A man on horseback, I think; I don't know," she said.

"To my mind, sir, it confirms my story," Wilmot persisted. "He must have sent it off, after Duval arrested him on board his ship. And he would naturally denounce Latour."

"There's treachery somewhere," said Charles very slowly, and his eyes wandered to Dr. Henchman's keen, grave face.

"There is, sir," the Prebendary answered firmly. "But I would stake my judgment it is not Ellesdon's, but Latour's."

The look that Julia shot at her defender brought a sudden dimness to the keen old eyes. But Wilmot stepped forward and in his turn handed a paper to the King.

"Dr. Henchman has not seen this paper, sir," he said. "This it is which convinced Colonel Phelps and me."

"Why," said the King lightly, "is this another letter?" But his smile faded, and his brows gathered, as he read on.

"A promise signed by Desborough and Macy to pay two thousand pounds for the delivery of the King! It is addressed to Mr. Ellesdon, and in the same handwriting. Where was this found?" he added loudly, and Wilmot answered at once, "On Mr. Ellesdon's person, sir, by Captain Jean Duval."

With a sharp exclamation Charles rose and pushed his chair back. He passed the note to Dr. Henchman and moved away across the room. The others waited in silence, but Julia stole to Dr. Henchman's side. Her face grew a shade paler as she read the note, but her trust and her courage never wavered. The King turned back and faced the little circle; but his eyes avoided Julia's now.

"Well, gentlemen?" he said.

"It is a forgery," said Julia bravely; but the King looked past her into the dark.

"There is treachery somewhere," he said again.

"May I ask Lord Wilmot, sir," said Dr. Henchman slowly, "what course under the circumstances he advises Your Majesty to adopt?"

The indifferent words struck Julia with a chill. But the King nodded curtly, and Wilmot eagerly explained.

"I am driven to the conclusion, sir, that Your Majesty is no longer safe at Heale. There is treachery at work against us somewhere, and wherever it be, we must leave this place without delay. Of course we could adopt Colonel Gunter's

plan and make for Sussex. But our information from Chichester is still incomplete; the distance is long, and every day increases the danger. The other course is to adopt the alternative offered by M. Latour. There is a ship at Southampton waiting. We could reach her to-morrow—no, it is nearly morning now—to-day; and she could sail to-night. Her Captain is here to receive us. Her preparations are all complete. M. Latour is a guide of infinite foresight and resource. In spite of what has been said to-night against him, I believe him to be devoted to Your Majesty's interests, and to deserve the confidence which I humbly recommend you to repose in him."

Wilmot's firm tone, his dignified language, his old and strong influence with the King told heavily in favour of his views. Charles turned to Phelips. "And you, Colonel Phelips, recommend that too?"

"I think I should, sir," said the Colonel, but it was with evident hesitation that he spoke. "I would sooner have cut off my right hand than believe Willie Ellesdon a traitor, but —"

The King broke in. "We will not discuss that further now. The question is should I do well to leave this, and to accept the Frenchman's offer of the ship at Southampton to-night —?"

Dr. Henchman took the question to himself. "I do not like," he said in his courtliest manner—his curtness had suddenly vanished; he was putting forth all his strength to win—"I do not like to differ from Lord Wilmot, who has claims on Your Majesty's attention with which none of ours can compare; and I know well how devotedly he has laboured to effect Your Majesty's escape. I will not plead now for Mr. Ellesdon, though I look forward to the day when these black doubts will be removed. The only question at this

moment is, can we trust M. Latour? I realize to the full his ability and resources and the immense convenience of his plan, and I know that Lord Wilmot's judgment rarely errs. But, if by any chance we were mistaken, once in his hands there would be no escape. Do we know enough of him to trust him with your life, sir? I won't take the responsibility of saying that I do."

"Your Majesty saw him at Trent, and liked him, I think," said Wilmot with a courtier's quickness.

"Yes. I liked him well enough," replied the King.

"That goes a long way, sir, with all your subjects," said Dr. Henchman cheerfully. "But I must say it is the only thing in his favour that I know."

"But you know nothing against him, Doctor?"

The Prebendary paused and smiled an almost deprecating smile. "Nothing, sir, except that he's a spy."

The word leaped out with startling distinctness. Charles took it up in an instant, and Wilmot reddened, almost as if an insult had been thrown at him.

"A spy! a spy!" cried the King sharply. "What proof have you of that?"

"Miss Coningsby holds the proof, sir. She will show it to you, as she showed it yesterday to me."

In silence—for she would not deign to plead again with a tribunal which seemed content to leave her lover under the cruellest of slurs—Julia drew from her dress a little thin wisp of paper and handed it to the King. He read it rapidly with knitted brows, then held it to the light of a candle and scrutinized the writing closely.

"It is the Cardinal's," he said, "and it contains a strong recommendation of Latour." Then he looked at Wilmot. "This man is clearly in the service of the Cardinal, and Mazarin as you know, has never been a friend of mine."

Wilmot looked troubled. "It doesn't follow, sir, that he would betray you to your foes."

"But he never mentioned this in his credentials," Dr. Henchman answered. "It does look as if he were something in the nature of a spy."

"Where did Miss Coningsby find it?" asked the King.

And then Julia told how she had picked it up at Mrs. Coventry's the night that Latour had first come there. And Mrs. Hyde and Dr. Henchman remembered the little incident of the scramble on the floor.

And Johnny—the barriers loosed at last—narrated Latour's nocturnal search for a locket which wasn't there, and his strange reserve about that note, which was. And the King listened, and walked away, while they waited in silence, and came back and read the note again. Then he stretched out his hand for the paper signed by Desborough and Macy, and carefully scanned that too. Then he came up to Colonel Gunter and confronted him.

"Colonel Gunter, you belong to neither party. What do you advise?"

"I would beg Your Majesty to come with me."

"Ah, but this man's ship is ready," sighed the King with a wistful gesture. "We could sail to-night, and I long to be safe upon the sea."

Again he turned from them, and crossing the room sat down by a table and leaned his head on his hands alone.

"There is treachery somewhere," he pondered. "Where is it? What could the French Government gain by my capture? Would Mazarin have any interest in betraying me? He might; he might; I know his crookedness too well. But if the ship is there, waiting, to-morrow, I could set foot in France, and all this weary hiding would be done." He sighed, and turning his back upon the others

gazed blankly before him, as if weighing the issue in his mind.

Suddenly he turned again. Something had touched his sleeve, and Julia Coningsby was kneeling by his chair. Her eyes were wet and shining. There was a look of pain upon her face; but with it a force and exaltation which he had never seen in it before.

“Sir,” she said, “I am not come to plead with you for the true and loyal gentleman I love. Time will show soon enough the falseness of the cruel charges brought against him to-night. But he would be the first to remind us that they matter little beside the safety of the King. Sir, I don’t ask you to trust Mr. Ellesdon, but if you owe anything to us, to the friends who have laboured for you, sacrificed everything for you, in these weary days, I do implore you not to place yourself in this Frenchman’s hands. Trust your own subjects still, sir, to find you the means of deliverance. There is not one of us but would gladly die for you; and if you will bear with us, we shall not fail to save you yet.”

The tears overflowed, as the sweet voice ended, and Charles, never proof against a woman’s pleadings, took her outstretched hand and raised it to his lips.

“Child,” he answered, courteously, tenderly, “I would trust you with all that I possess.” Then he moved his shoulders with a despairing gesture. “But I can’t stay here,” he said.

Gunter advanced a little. “Will you move to Racton, sir?” he asked.

“I would rather move to Southampton, if —” and Charles paused doubtfully again.

Wilmot opened his mouth to answer, but Dr. Henchman seized the moment and struck firmly in. “I think Your

Majesty feels that it is no longer safe to remain here, and that if M. Latour's offer could be relied on, it would be the best and the simplest way of escape." He paused imperceptibly, and as Charles nodded, went rapidly on, "And I am sure that every one of us feels that, if the Frenchman can be trusted, such a chance as he gives us ought not to be missed. Well, sir, I propose that we test him."

"How?" asked the King.

"Let him be told that Your Majesty wishes to accept his offer, and will ride out and meet him on the Southampton road. The place and time Lord Wilmot will arrange. Then, to avoid unpleasant surprises, let two parties be formed. The first will ride on ahead to the meeting-place at the hour stated, and in that party Mr. Johnny Erle, not for the first time, will personate the King."

"Ah!" said Charles and Johnny in a breath.

"Then, if foul play is intended, and an ambush prepared, the wrong man will fall into it, and the second party will have time to take another course, and to make for our friends in Hampshire, as Colonel Gunter has proposed."

"And if there be no foul play?" Wilmot asked.

"Then, later on, the two parties can unite. M. Latour will understand and approve of the precaution, if he be an honest gentleman only anxious for the safety of the King."

"But suppose all went smoothly till we reach Southampton," Charles suggested, "and that then things went—amiss?"

Dr. Henchman shook his head. "If we reach Southampton safely, sir, I am not much afraid. If M. Latour allows us to get so far uninterrupted, it will mean that his ship and his offer are genuine, and that our suspicions have done him wrong. If, on the other hand, he means mischief, he will strike his blow long before that."

"What do you say, Wilmot?" asked the King.

"I have no objection to offer, sir. The more precautions, the better, of course."

"And you, Mr. Erle?"

Johnny's glistening eyes and radiant features were sufficient reply, even without the quick assurance of service which broke from his lips.

"But you take all the risks, you remember," said the King with a warning smile. "Will Miss Coningsby let you do that?"

Julia had risen to her feet. "Johnny is no more afraid, sir," she said with a certain gentle stateliness which became her well, "than other brave gentlemen have been before him, to risk danger and capture, and misunderstanding, for the sake of his King."

Charles rose too, and as he passed Miss Coningsby, he took her hand for a moment and whispered low. "Explain that paper," he said, "and I shall be the first to ask his pardon." Then without waiting for a reply, he called Wilmot and Dr. Henchman to him, and drawing them apart began rapidly to settle the details of their flight.

"Let me keep those papers, Julia," said Johnny. And in silence Miss Coningsby handed him Mazarin's note and Macy's promise to Latour.

It was still the middle of the night when Lord Wilmot and Phelps left Heale to return to Salisbury. It was barely morning when Latour heard from Wilmot, with secret exultation that the King had decided to meet him that day and to accept his offer of a ship. It was yet dark, with the mists of an autumnal morning hanging heavy over the river and clothing with greyness the surrounding trees, when Charles was smuggled out of Heale on foot across the meadows to a quiet corner of Clarendon Park, where he was

to wait with Colonel Gunter till they were joined some hours later with horses and provisions by their friends. But it was full day and by no means early when another party, consisting of Dr. Henchman and Miss Coningsby and Mr. Johnny Erle, rode out of the gates of Heale House together, followed from the door step by the wistful eyes and waving handkerchief of Mrs. Hyde, whose cheery voice was much quieter than usual, and whose pale face bore witness to the vigil of the night.

One other pair of eyes, finer but not less wistful, one other woman's face, fairer but not less pale, watched from a window the little party leave the house. Rose Limbry had attached herself of late to Julia deeply, and had insisted that morning in helping to prepare her for the start. Something in the girl's looks had attracted Miss Coningsby's attention, an expression of trouble, almost of fear, in the deep, dreamy eyes, and she had questioned her till a sudden confession had explained the cause. She had been dreaming, that was all, Rose said, and the dream had haunted her. Had she forgotten it? No; it was vivid, horribly vivid still. In her dream she had seen together Mr. Trenchard, Mr. Ellesdon, and the French gentleman M. Latour. They were all in a dark room, somewhere; she did not know it, but she had noticed a white peacock moulded on the wall; and they were quarrelling, and Mr. Ellesdon's hands were bound. There was a crowd of soldiers round the door. And then she had seen swords flashing suddenly, and in a mist, men fighting, but she could not see their faces in the gloom; till a light flared up, and on the floor a man was lying, and his face, as she bent over it, was white and still.

“Whose was it, whose was it?” Julia had broken out, unable to restrain herself any longer. And with a rush of tears the girl had answered “Tom's.”

Miss Coningsby, pressed as she was, had found time to comfort her companion, to rally her, to argue with her, to laugh tenderly over the needless tears bred by such foolish dreams. But she rode away from Heale that morning with a certain chill discomfort at her heart ; and she left a heavier and still more unquiet heart behind.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MINE EXPLODES

Two hundred and fifty years ago there stood at a rising corner of the road which ran southeast from Salisbury across the northern edges of the forest to Southampton port, a large and comfortable inn. Outside, its purple brickwork, its haunted eaves, and twisted chimneys, its great square windows with their many little panes, and its wide range of stables, out-buildings and barns, gave it a dignity beyond its station, and something of the high air of a manor-house. Inside, despite dark ways and narrow passages, where the incautious wanderer's head was like enough to come in angry contact with undreamt-of beams, there were rooms not unworthy of this exterior stateliness, and a wide courtyard surrounded by a gallery, whence curious chambermaids commanded views of every visitor that arrived. The corner where this well-known hostelry emerged upon the highway from the green undulations round, was bordered by a wind-swept copse, and any one who chose to linger in the woodlands, which straggled up the low hillside towards the distant towns, could see for some extent the white road winding, along which travellers from Salisbury must come.

On the afternoon following the debate in Mrs. Hyde's bed-chamber two parties of riders were on their way towards this spot. In front rode Colonel Phelps, fully armed; and he was immediately followed by Miss Juliana Coningsby, upon a double horse. But the plainly-dressed young man,

who shared it with her, and who combined the equipment of a groom with the bearing of a king, resembled Charles in all respects so closely, even to the dye on his hands and the rough cut of his hair, that it needed more than one glance to be certain that it was indeed our old friend Johnny Erle. Behind them at a little distance, also well armed and watchful, for on him it depended, at the first sign of danger, to turn and carry the alarm to Charles—rode Wilmot, a cloud upon his handsome face; for he knew that his responsibility was heavy, and yet he only half approved of the precautions adopted by the King. Charles himself, with Dr. Henchman and Colonel Gunter, was following in a second party, about an hour behind, prepared at a moment's notice to divert his course, and to turn across country towards the houses of Colonel Gunter's relatives and friends.

Inside the inn, Tom Trenchard and his prisoner were passing the time as best they could, Tom waiting for instructions from his superiors as to how to dispose of his involuntary guest, and Ellesdon, who on condition of being left unguarded had given his word not to attempt to escape, of necessity waiting upon him. They had ridden over from Romsey that morning, with Tom's troopers at their heels, expecting to find their orders at the wayside inn, and there they remained, after sending a messenger to Macy, disconsolately wondering when the answer would arrive. Ellesdon was also wondering in secret whether his note had ever got to Heale, and how his mishap would affect the movements of the King; and Tom was asking himself, in no agreeable temper, what crooked purpose of Latour's the arrest of Ellesdon was designed to serve. Insensibly the two young men had been drawn to each other. They were both young, straightforward, honest, fond of the fair

county they lived in and of the sport afforded by its streams and hills, parted only by politics for which both really cared little, united in interest and fellowship by love for which both cared much.

Suddenly Trenchard pushed back his chair and rose from the table with a loud exclamation of surprise.

“What is it?” asked Ellesdon.

“Horses galloping,” said Tom over his shoulder from the window; “and I think I heard a cry.”

“It’s the men in the yard perhaps,” suggested Ellesdon.

“No; it’s not,” said Tom decisively. “There’s something moving in that wood beyond the house.”

“Well, I can’t see round corners,” said Ellesdon. The old garden with its broken dial beneath the window was peaceful and undisturbed enough.

“There is, all the same,” retorted Trenchard; and to confirm him, a clatter of horses’ hoofs, of men’s voices, and of troops moving to the direction of a quick stentorian voice, came up on the dusty air.

“I must go and see what it is. You’ll stay here, won’t you?”

“I’m under your orders,” said Ellesdon, with a touch of bitterness in his smile.

“I won’t keep you long; I mean I’ll be back directly,” said Tom good-naturedly, and his companion’s bitterness vanished at once.

The road to the west of the inn was a moving mass of men and horses, whose manœuvres it took Tom some moments to understand. But presently he discerned in the middle of the surrounding troopers, a small party of riders being escorted slowly to the inn, and Captain Macy shouting and gesticulating, as his custom was.

“It’s an ambush,” Tom muttered; “our fellows were

evidently waiting concealed in the wood. And they've taken some prisoners apparently, but one of them seems to have escaped."

Far away in the distance a dim speck of a man on a horse was riding, riding recklessly as if for life towards the west, while half a dozen troopers had started to pursue him, but so far behind as to make the conclusion of the chase foregone. Tom watched with interest, as the little party of prisoners drew up and dismounted at the door.

"By Jove, if that isn't Miss Coningsby!" he soliloquized; "and that fellow with her, can it be Johnny Erle?"

While he doubted and stared, Macy clapped him on the shoulder. "Hullo, Trenchard," he said—he was in high good humour—"I got your message, and you've got your prisoner here? But I had some prisoners of my own to look after before I could join you, you see."

"Who are they, sir?" asked Tom.

"You'll know directly," smiled the Captain, and he led the way through the hall into a room beyond, followed by a party of soldiers escorting the prisoners he had made. Miss Coningsby, a little pale, but quite undaunted, was handed to a chair. The dark-faced groom placed himself behind her, closely guarded, and Colonel Phelps stepped to the front.

"Now then," said the Captain, "you will give me your names without concealment or disguise."

"First of all, sir," answered Phelps boldly, and his air of authority insensibly impressed the spectators, "you will be good enough to explain by what authority you have committed this outrage on three travellers riding peaceably on the King's highway."

"The King's highway!" repeated Macy, with grim

irony. "I think, my friend, your language and your tone are out of date. There is no King in England"—he thumped the table before him—"and any man who claims such a title does so under pain of death."

He stared at Johnny as he spoke, but Johnny was staring out of the window in supreme indifference, wondering if Wilmot had thrown off the troopers and how long it would take him to carry the news to the King.

"That is no answer to my question," said Phelps calmly.

"Oh, make yourself easy, my friend," retorted Macy. "My authority is a soldier's orders. I know none better, and I render no account to you. Now then, your names!"

"I decline to give them," said Phelps. It mattered little when Macy discovered them. But the longer they maintained his delusion, the more time Charles would have to escape.

"You decline, eh? I warn you, you'll gain nothing by contumacy—all the more as I think we can name you for ourselves."

"Then it's hardly necessary to question us," said Phelps. "Understand that we regard this arrest as an outrage, that we refuse to admit your authority, and that we demand to be taken back to Salisbury, and be charged before the Justices, if you have any charge to urge."

"All in good time," sneered Macy. "You'll see enough of the Justices, take my word for it, before we're done. Now then, again do you refuse to give your names?"

"I do," said Phelps.

"And you?" Macy turned to Miss Coningsby, who simply bowed her head.

"And you, sir?"

"Yes, I refuse," said John, with a glance at Phelps.

"Very well," Macy's tones were firm and eager. "Then, Lord Wilmot, I arrest you, as a rebel; and you, Miss Coningsby for harbouring the enemies of the State; and you, Charles Stuart, calling yourself King of Scotland —"

"I call myself nothing," said John simply, "but the King of Scotland is called King of England too."

For an instant, Macy hesitated. The dark-faced lad in feature was strangely like the young man he had arrested in Bridport by mistake. But his hair was cut shorter now, his hands were darker—those were points which Latour had mentioned as distinctive of the King—and there was a lofty composure about him which surely he had not seen in Johnny Erle. No, he was not mistaken. This time it really was King Charles himself.

"A King without a crown or kingdom," he retorted. "He is called Charles Stuart here and nothing else. I arrest you, sir, in the name of the Commonwealth of England!" And stepping towards him he laid a hand on Johnny's arm.

"Most dramatic!" said Johnny calmly. "Well, it is not for me to contradict."

"Contradiction is useless," said Macy.

"Quite; as useless as our baptismal names," said John. The Captain stared, but the young man's air of self-command impressed him, and Johnny rose with a will to his part. "Well, Captain, you will take us to Salisbury, I suppose?"

"In half-an-hour's time."

"Good. Till then perhaps Miss Coningsby may rest. You will of course guard us closely, but this gentleman—Lord Wilmot, I think you called him—may, I imagine stay with me?"

"Certainly, sir," Captain Macy's overbearing tones had

dropped, as opposition vanished, and he answered with something like respect.

"Then we will wait here. We need not detain you further now," said John.

For an instant Phelps smiled and Miss Coningsby hid her face in her hands. Captain Macy stared again, but the dark young man faced him with so regal an air of command, that, muttering something to himself, he abstained from comment, and proceeded to give directions to his men. Guards were posted at the door, below the window, outside in the passage, and all round the inn. Then the Captain withdrew for refreshment, and the troopers followed him. Miss Coningsby hardly waited till the door was closed.

"John," she said, "you were perfectly splendid. But how long can we keep it up?"

"Till we get to Salisbury, I hope," said John; "unless that black knave Latour arrives upon the scene. And the best of it is, this smug thick-headed Captain is the very man who arrested me before."

"You must have improved in looks since then," said Phelps smiling. "But he's been well primed, for he's very sure of us all. I'm thankful that he takes me for Wilmot, however; it'll make those fellows much less keen in their pursuit."

"He got a fine start," said Johnny. "He was off like a flash directly you gave the alarm."

"Please God, he warns the King in time," said Phelps earnestly. "He was wrong, we were terribly wrong together, in relying on that scoundrel as we did."

"Oh, for an hour of Latour!" sighed Johnny, with vindictive emphasis in reply.

And through the wall a low voice cried "Amen."

The three occupants of the room started and looked round. As he spoke, Johnny had been leaning back against the wall, and the fervour of his feelings had unconsciously imparted a ring to his voice, which had carried the sound through a crack in the panelling and produced this strange reply. After a brief pause Johnny burst out laughing. But Miss Coningsby, with a sudden inspiration, moved past him, and tapped on the wall.

“Who is there?” she called. “Who is there? Answer.”

“Julia, Julia,” came in muffled tones a well-known voice in reply; and in an instant Miss Coningsby was kneeling by the crack in the woodwork, her eager fingers catching at the panels, her bright eyes dim with emotion and delight.

“Willie, Willie, Willie,” she cried, as if the dear name alone were enough to satisfy her longing.

“It’s Ellesdon, by all that’s amazing,” said Johnny, in explanation to Colonel Phelps, who stood wondering by.

“By Jove, I should like to beg his pardon!” said the honest Colonel promptly.

“And so you ought, a thousand times over,” cried Julia, turning suddenly upon him. “May you never know what it is, Colonel Phelps, to be deserted, when in trouble, by your friends!”

And Colonel Phelps could only redden and stammer in reply, while Johnny’s eyes twinkled with sly joy at his discomfiture, and Miss Coningsby turned to the wall again whispering with pathetic iteration, “Oh, Willie, my dear, my dear, my dear!”

But before this strange and muffled interview could go further, it was interrupted by a noise outside—the noise of steps and of voices approaching, of the guard moving, of a hand undoing the fastenings of the door.

"Hark!" cried Johnny, in excitement. "Whose voice is that?" And at the same moment the door swung open, and Captain Macy entered, followed by Latour.

Colonel Phelps stepped instantly forward, his hand searching vainly for the sword they had taken from him on his arrest. Miss Coningsby turned and leaped to her feet, with a look of fierce and scornful anger, which Johnny had never seen in her face before. But Johnny, by a triumph of self-control deliberately turned his back on the newcomers, and walking away into the furthest corner, stared down at the burnt-out ashes in the grate.

"Congratulate me, Monsieur," said the Captain with a vile French accent, and as Miss Coningsby thought with a viler tone of triumph in his voice. "You shall see for yourself that this time there is no mistake."

Latour stood for a moment on the threshold, gazing into the room, which now was none too light, and his expression seemed more sinister than ever with the satisfied malice it conveyed. "But where is Lord Wilmot?" he asked suddenly.

"Why, there in front of you," cried Macy, pointing at Phelps; but even as he spoke his face changed in the most astonishing way, for he had read his error in Latour's blank look and curling lip.

"That, my friend," said the Frenchman, with cool insolence, "is no more Lord Wilmot than I! That is my old acquaintance, Colonel Phelps;" and with an insulting laugh, he stepped forward, his eyes searching anxiously for the other personages in the room.

But he got no further. The old Cavalier had lost his sword, but on the table near there lay the riding gloves which he had just thrown down. It was the work of an instant to step forward and seize one, and then, before any

man could read his mind, to wheel round and fling it full in the Frenchman's face.

"Yes, you cowardly knave," he cried, "Colonel Phelps, who is still young enough to thrash you for the spy and scoundrel that you are."

In that instant Julia forgave Colonel Phelps for mistrusting her lover, and across the group of men who flung themselves upon him to separate him from Latour, she beamed at him a brilliant smile of sympathy and thanks. But Latour, smarting under the blow and the disgrace of it, was with difficulty restrained from drawing his sword. He yielded, however, to Macy's forcible protests and contented himself with a black look and an ominous threat.

"I shall remember, Colonel Phelps. I never fail to pay these debts with interest, as you'll find. Now, Macy," he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously—"it's the others that matter. Ah, that is Miss Coningsby—no one could mistake her"—his face relaxed a little as he made a bow, which the lady returned with an unbending stare. "Then her groom should not be far distant. Ah! I think that this time there is no mistake."

Johnny was standing at the other end of the room, his back turned to them, still gazing into the empty grate. His broad shoulders were drooped, as Charles was sometimes wont to droop his; his dark head, as he had seen the King's, a little bent; his short black hair, ill-cut, as Charles' had been by the Penderels; his hands folded behind him, dyed as Charles' had been with walnut juice; and in the whole pose of his figure, which he had carefully studied from the King's, a look of hopeless apathy which breathed dejection and defeat. He took no notice, apparently, of what was going on in the room, though in the tumult caused by Phelps' attack he had glanced round, unseen, for a mo-

ment, only to resume his faultless attitude again. Latour paused, watching him, completely duped, and in his satisfaction the anger died out of his face.

"It pains me to have been driven to deceive Your Highness," he began; then paused again. But his Highness' only answer was a sigh.

"It was the interests of France, not my own wish, sir, which compelled me to inform the English Government of your plans."

"And I trusted you, Latour," said the King in the accents of a father. But he did not turn round.

Latour winced, though his cynical smile remained. But the soldiers guarding Colonel Phelps were startled by a sound resembling a burst of laughter throttled at its birth. At the same moment the captive monarch's head was buried in his hands.

"I can assure Your Majesty," said Latour, increasing in deference as the conviction of success took possession of his mind, "that you will be treated with all consideration, and that you may rely on any good offices that the Cardinal can render with the Government at Whitehall."

"Ah, the Cardinal, the Cardinal!" said His Majesty, still without turning. "I fear the Cardinal is little better than a knave."

"Sir!"

"But a clever knave, and not easily duped, I fancy. In that point, M. Latour, unlike his agents here."

"Sir!" said the Frenchman again, and he stepped closer. Did some change strike him in the tone or manner of the King?

Then the King's head suddenly went up; his shoulders straightened; with a ringing laugh he swung himself round and seized the Frenchman's hands, and drew him nearer

and nearer with a grip he would have been a Hercules to resist.

"Closer still, and closer, and closer," he cried, in a voice which had completely changed. "Stare your fill! Make sure of your capture, my dear traitor, and scoundrel, and spy! And you, Captain Macy, make an end of this mockery, for it's not the first time that you've been fooled by Johnny Erle."

No painter could depict, no decent page embody, the look which passed over Latour's features, the torrent which broke from Captain Macy's lips. Speechless with dread, dismay and fury, the Frenchman dragged Johnny to the light, and gazed him over and over as if determined not to believe the truth.

"It can't be, it can't be, it can't be," he muttered, his crushing disappointment still struggling with his recognition of the truth.

"Exactly," said Johnny pitilessly, but holding on still to his victim, for he saw the passion gathering in his eyes. "It can't be any one except your old acquaintance, Johnny Erle."

Regardless of anything except the rage possessing him, the rage of hatred baffled, triumph wrecked, Latour wrenched his right hand free from Johnny, and in an instant his drawn sword was in the air. But in that instant Johnny had pinioned his arm against the window frame, and with a crash the hilt went through the glass. The noise startled Macy, who, with brows as black as thunder, was still staring incredulously at John, stopped the Captain's flow of imprecations, and brought him quickly to himself.

"Steady there," he cried. "I'll have no bloodshed." His anger was directed less at John than at Latour. After all, it was Latour who had deceived him, who had prom-

ised everything and provided nothing. "Put that sword up, Latour. I command here, and you've gulled me if he's gulled you."

"He shall pay for it, he shall pay for it," panted the Frenchman. His blind anger had mastered him completely now. But Johnny's grip was telling on him, and pinioned as he was he was powerless to hurt.

"He shall answer to the Justices, anyhow," Macy consoled him.

"Answer for what?" asked Johnny, in disdain.

"For your fraud and imposture, you young Jackanapes."

"What fraud? For insisting that I am myself?"

"Well then," blustered the Captain, his voice growing strong as his logic grew weak, "for conniving at the escape of the King!"

"What King?" asked Johnny superbly. "I thought you said there were no Kings in England. You must have Kings on the brain, Captain Macy, if you see one in every man you meet."

"Never you mind. I'll find enough to damn you," swore the Captain, to whom strong language was an infallible relief.

"No doubt, but you'll also have to find proof for your charges. And it won't help your case when I inform the Justices of this murderous assault on me."

Johnny was master of the situation, and even in his rage and disappointment Macy had sense enough to recognize the fact. Latour was separated from his adversary and induced to postpone his revenge. Johnny and Phelps were bound and placed under close arrest. And Macy drew Latour away and closed the door.

The busy-minded Frenchman, having recovered from his fury was already facing his discomfiture, and revolving fresh schemes of attack. "I know the King was at Heale," he

persisted, more as if debating with himself than as if concerned to persuade his now sceptical ally. "And I know he was somewhere close to Salisbury last night. Wilmot came to me from him. Wilmot believed in me completely, I could swear."

"So it seems," interjected Macy bitterly.

"You fool; I know my man and I know I had got him. Something must have happened. Some one must have betrayed us. You said Ellesdon had been brought here!" They were in a room together across the passage now.

"Yes, he's here with Trenchard."

"Under guard, of course?"

"Yes, he could have done nothing."

"I tell you, man," Latour broke out suddenly—"I know Charles is somewhere close by us, and I will have him yet! It is so, it is so"—as the Captain shook his head—"this whole elaborate imposture proves it. This was only devised to throw us off the scent. We must scour the country till we recover the clue."

"That's easier said than done," said Captain Macy.

"Give me the men and I'll do it myself," replied Latour.

"I want my men," said Macy sullenly; "I'm going to take my prisoners to Salisbury, and Ellesdon too."

"But there are Trenchard's men," the other retorted quickly. "The General put him at my orders if I chose."

"Then you'd better see him and give your orders for yourself."

Latour assented, and Macy left him to summon Tom.

The Frenchman walked up and down in solitude, his head sunk on his breast, his brows twitching, his lips moving restlessly, buried in thought. Then he came up to the fireplace, and kicked the beech logs there into a blaze, and the flame leaped up and illumined the shadowy room. It was

low-roofed and full of corners, with black oak rafters crossing the ceiling, and black oak panelling rendering dark and dignified the walls. Only round the mantelpiece was there any trace of lighter decoration, and round that some ambitious architect had moulded in white plaster a curious design—flat peacocks strutting on a terrace, and spreading out exaggerated tails. As Latour's eyes wandered over them idly, his keen mind full all the while of other things, the door opened and Trenchard came in.

“ You have heard what has happened ? ” Latour began at once.

“ Macy has told me. I was with Ellesdon in the next room and heard the noise. It's a terrible sell ! ”

“ A sell ! ” cried Latour, the other's easy good-nature acting like a sharp irritant on his sorely tried nerves. “ It's a fraud, an imposture, of the worst description.”

Tom merely shrugged his shoulders, but the other went rapidly on. “ The question is how did they contrive it ? What warned them and made them change their plans ? ”

“ I can't imagine,” said Tom.

“ They were in my hands, in my hands, I tell you. They had agreed to act on my proposal, and to make for Southampton direct. You stopped Ellesdon ? ”

“ Yes, I stopped him.” Tom was not very proud of his job.

“ And I had convinced them that he had played them false. Something at the last moment must have warned them. You guarded your prisoner closely, of course ? ”

“ Oh yes,” said Tom.

“ He had no chance of communicating with his friends ? ”

“ No ; except—— ” Tom paused.

“ Except what ? ” Latour's voice was sharp and imper-

ious ; his temper had suffered from the disappointments of the day.

“ I allowed him to send a line—a line only, undated—to tell Miss Coningsby why he was detained —— ”

Tom got no further, for his eyes were riveted on the Frenchman’s face. The colour had all gone out of it. The sinister eyes glared at him with a concentrated fury he had never seen in mortal eyes before. For a moment Latour was literally white and speechless with rage. Then his fist fell with a crash upon the mantelpiece, and with a gasp the torrent of his anger overflowed.

“ You let him write to Miss Coningsby ! After all my orders and precautions ! You inconceivable blockhead ! You blundering, treacherous, blind, besotted fool ! ”

“ Stop that abuse,” cried Tom, in a warning voice. “ Stop that ! I warn you I won’t stand language of that kind, Latour.”

“ You’ll stand precisely what I choose to tell you,” cried the Frenchman, recklessly, stepping nearer to the lad. “ I always knew you for a lout and a dullard, but I never dreamed that even you were capable of such consummate imbecility as that.”

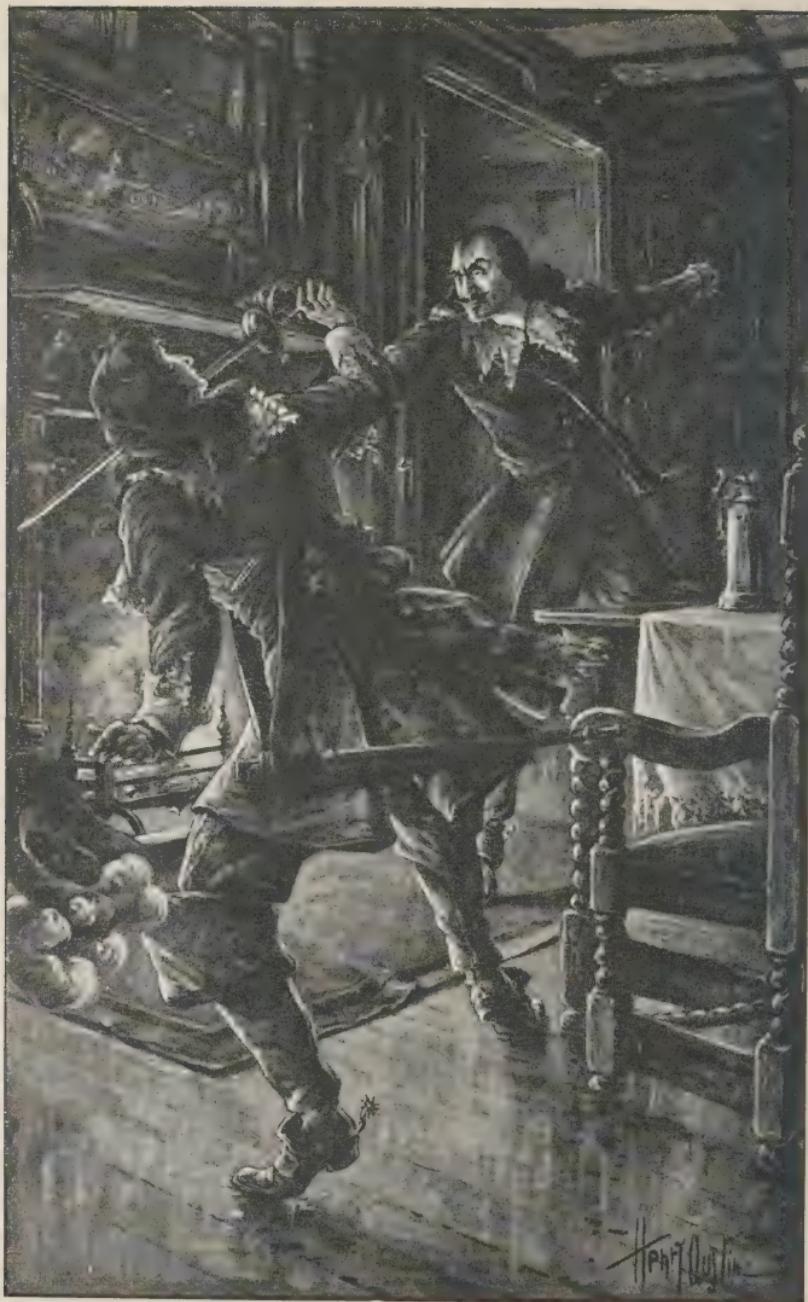
“ Take care ! ” said Tom between his teeth, his temper rising.

“ How dared you, I say ? Did he bribe you ? ”

“ Take care, M. Latour,” Tom repeated. Abuse of his intelligence he might put up with, but a slur upon his honour was another thing.

“ Oh, he paid you, did he ? He paid you ? Of course ! I know that you’ll do most things, if you get your price.”

The taunt was past bearing, all the bitterer for the suggestion of truth which it conveyed to a lad who had



"Latour's sword went through him"

allowed himself for want of money to become the instrument of methods he disdained. Without a word Tom flung out his fist at his insulter, and Latour measured his length upon the floor.

But he was upon his feet in an instant, his sword out and flashing in his hand. "Defend yourself, defend yourself," he muttered, hardly waiting for his adversary to draw. But Tom, though slow of speech, was quick of action wherever fighting was to be had, and he had just time to guard as Latour lunged at him with a force and malice that bespoke the deadliness of his intent.

To and fro, round and round, in the narrow space at their disposal, the dark walls close behind them, the table enclosing them on one side, and on the other the dancing firelight in the grate—to and fro, round and round, ever swifter and swifter, the steel flashing, the boards beneath them creaking, the two men breathing harder and harder, as the moments passed—the struggle moved and wavered, but the issue never was in doubt. Tom had the strength and hardihood of youth behind him, the clear eye and leaping blood of perfect health, the arm and the shoulders of a stalwart race. But Latour had years of skill and practice as a swordsman, and the white fury of his anger only intensified the trained suppleness of his iron wrist, the quickness of his watchful and malignant eye. As Tom pressed hard, trying by force alone to best him, the Frenchman gave ground for a moment, and his adversary overreached himself. Before he could recover, Latour's sword had gone through him, and with a crash, dragging a heavy chair over with him, Tom fell, mortally wounded, to the ground.

The noise of his fall rang through the little room and down the corridor outside. It was heard by the party

of prisoners, whom Macy's soldiers were just then assembling there. It was heard by Ellesdon, who, his hands now bound and closely guarded, was standing with them by the doorway, waiting for the rest. It was heard by Julia, with a sudden presentiment of terror that she could not have explained. Then came a pause, and then across the stillness a boy's voice weakly crying, "Rose." With an answering cry, and guided by the weak voice only, Julia broke from the guards, and ran to the doorway whence it came. "Rose," came the call again, more chokingly, and in an instant the door was open, and together Julia and Ellesdon were inside the room.

The light was dim, but enough to see the figure of the dying lad stretched upon the floor; enough to see Latour with a horrible expression standing over him, as he wiped his streaming sword; enough to see—for even in moments of tragedy such trifles seize the eye and touch the mind—the wanton firelight leaping, the gaunt white peacocks strutting on the plastered wall. She had seen it all before, it was Rose's vision—Julia remembered in a moment. And with a heart bleeding for the girl's yet unknown sorrow, Julia flung herself down beside him on the floor.

"Tell me, tell me anything," she cried, "I will take Rose your message."

With a low moaning sound Tom raised himself upon his side a little, and a wan smile broke over his face. "She was to be—my—wife," he murmured. "Tell her—I loved her—I loved her!" And with a gentle sigh he fell back dead.

Julia's tears flowed fast as she bent over him; but Ellesdon, who had been kneeling by her, suddenly leaped to his feet and looked sharply round.

"Where is the scoundrel who killed him?" he cried.

“ Stop him, some one, stop him ! Arrest him ! Captain Macy, I call you to witness that here is murder done.”

But Macy stood staring in the doorway, and his soldiers waited, staring, upon him.

“ Yes, follow him, some of you,” he assented stupidly.
“ But I’m afraid it’s too late,” he added weakly.

It was too late. Latour was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII

M. LATOUR'S LAST BID FOR SUCCESS

HUGH had given his word, on his release by Macy, to stay quietly at Trent for eight-and-forty hours, at the end of which time Latour had reckoned that the success of his combinations would be quite secure. But he waited chafing all the while at his inaction, fuming at the relatives who recommended patience and at the friends who left him without news; and at the end of that time, with the full assent of Colonel Wyndham, who was as feverishly anxious as his son, but who felt bound by the King's wishes to remain at Trent, he started off for Salisbury to make enquiries for himself. He arrived there within an hour or two of the return of Captain Macy's force, and riding straight to Canon Erle's, found the very people he most wished to see, tumbled into Johnny's arms in the hall, was warmly welcomed by Julia at the door of the parlour, and within ten minutes was possessed of all their secrets and rejoicing in the cheerful comfort of their company again.

Captain Macy had led his prisoners back to Salisbury, sobered in spirit and humbled in design. The more he reflected on the day's events, the less he liked them, and the stronger grew his conviction that he had no serious charge to prefer against Colonel Phelps, Miss Coningsby, and Johnny Erle. Against Ellesdon, it was true, there was a warrant and a definite charge to press, though without Latour's evidence he doubted if it could be sustained. Ellesdon he was justified in detaining, at least till the Justices

had enquired into his case, though he had given orders for his being civilly treated and for his hands to be unbound. But, as he rode along behind his convoy, it became very clear to the Captain that he had no case against the rest. He could not seriously bring them up before the Justices, on the ground that he had mistaken them for some one else. He would only expose himself to ridicule if he confessed how completely he had been duped. He remembered his mishap at Bridport. He reflected that Latour's disappearance swept away the foundations of his case. He had ever before his eyes the pitiful spectacle of the dead boy, his own subordinate, lying on that parlour-floor, and realized that a powerful family like the Trenchards would never suffer Tom's death to go unavenged. As the party drew near Salisbury he called a halt, and with as much dignity as he could muster, informed Phelps that, if he and Johnny Erle would give assurances for their good behaviour, he was prepared to allow them to spend the night with their own friends.

Phelips was inclined to answer curtly, but Johnny laid a warning hand upon his arm. Johnny had guessed the Captain's difficulty, and was prepared to make it easy for him to climb down.

"I don't know what you mean by assurances," began Phelps.

"Oh, we can assure the Captain that we'll go quietly home and not disturb the streets," said John.

"I must have your addresses," said the Captain.

"By all means," said Johnny. "I shall carry them off to my uncle's, Canon Erle's."

"Miss Coningsby goes free with us," said Phelps firmly.

"I am prepared to assent to that," replied Macy loftily.

Johnny's eyes twinkled. "Thank the Captain nicely,

Julia," he murmured. "Then of course," he added louder, "Mr. Ellesdon will come too."

"No, no," said Macy, and then an argument began.

At first the others refused to leave Ellesdon.

"Let him charge us altogether," said Phelps in a very audible undertone; "he knows he's not got the shadow of a case." But on the point of Ellesdon's detention Macy would yield nothing, and ultimately Ellesdon persuaded the others to take their freedom alone.

"You can do more for me, if you're free," he reminded Julia. "Go and see one or two of the Justices in Salisbury, and insist on an enquiry into my case at once." And on these grounds his advice prevailed.

So that night, when Hugh Wyndham joined them, Phelps and Johnny and Julia were already delivered from Captain Macy's hands, and already making fresh plans for a start on the morrow to rejoin once more the fortunes of the King.

But in the new enterprise Julia would not share. To Charles, she felt, she could no longer be of service, even if they succeeded in recovering his track. She would only impede them in their efforts to find him. She could not scour the country, she protested, for days together with three men at her heels. Her first duty was to work for Ellesdon's deliverance. Her next to go and comfort that poor girl at Heale. Let the boys follow the King and with God's help save him. Her own part must be less stirring, but they could not doubt where she was needed most.

And the boys did not doubt the brave girl's wisdom, as they rode off early next morning, in Colonel Phelps' company, without asking Captain Macy's leave, eastward towards the Hampshire country where they hoped to find traces of Colonel Gunter and the King. Julia spent that

morning going round with Canon Erle to influential friends, and making interest with the Justices of Salisbury in Ellesdon's behalf, and in that task her eloquence and beauty served her even more than the wide respect her host enjoyed. Then, after a long and happy visit to the soldiers' quarters where her lover was confined, a visit in which for the first time she made to Ellesdon a full and clear confession of her love, she turned her face back sadly towards Heale, to carry her tidings of sorrow to the maid who waited there, for a lover who never could bring nor ask for confessions again.

Meanwhile Charles and his companions had sought safety in flight. Wilmot, who was well mounted for the purpose, had had little difficulty in shaking off the troopers' pursuit. Once warned and convinced of the ambush awaiting them, he had turned and ridden off at a breakneck pace, and in a very short time he had rejoined the King. Scarcely pausing to explain the peril before them, he laid a hand at once on Charles' bridle, and led him straight across country till they were hidden in the undulations of the hills, gallantly followed by Colonel Gunter and Dr. Henchman, who, waiving all comment, spurred after them as hard as they could go. For a couple of hours the little party kept up the same extraordinary speed, neither asking nor receiving explanations, till they had left the Southampton road many miles behind. Then at last their guide allowed them to slacken their efforts, and at the foot of a steep incline Charles called a halt.

“So Latour was a knave, after all?” said the King.

“Yes, sir; at least there was a troop of rebels lying in wait for us at the corner of a wood. But thanks to your precautions, they have captured the wrong man.”

“You must thank Dr. Henchman for that,” said Charles. “You and I, Wilmot, had we had our way, would have

been taken in the trap. These gentlemen were wiser than we were. Poor Johnny! But he can cope with any situation. And Miss Coningsby? Wilmot, did you see what became of her?"

"I fear, sir, she was taken prisoner with the others."

Charles sighed. "It's my fate to bring misfortune to my friends. Well, gentlemen," he continued, addressing Dr. Henchman and Colonel Gunter, "you have proved your right to advise us. I will adopt any course you recommend."

"If Your Majesty will honour us——" began Gunter shyly.

"Of course I will, my friend," said Charles. "I put myself in your hands thankfully, and will follow wherever you lead."

The Colonel flushed with pleasure, and Dr. Henchman smiled his assent. "Then we might reach Hambledon tonight, sir," Gunter suggested. "There, as Lord Wilmot knows, my sister Mrs. Symons, has a house. And there you could rest safely while we communicate with Mansel and make sure that the ship is ready on the Sussex coast."

"I can ask for no better hosts than your family, Colonel, and for no better scheme than one which you and the Doctor approve. From the top of this hill then, we make straight for Hambledon; only, if Wilmot will let us, I think we'll moderate the pace."

It was dark and late when four weary horsemen dismounted at Mrs. Symons' door in a beautiful village on the edge of Bere Forest, far to the East, among the Hampshire hills. Mrs. Symons received them with the warmest welcome. Phelps and Wilmot had both been lately in the neighbourhood, and she was not altogether unprepared. Her husband, an uncourtly squire who loved the bottle, was

happily absent at the village-inn, and it was not thought necessary to summon him or to take him into the great secret, when he came. Indeed, on his return from the tavern, the good gentleman was so merry in his cups, that he insisted on the newcomers drinking with him. Taking a stool, he poised himself unsteadily by Charles' side, and proceeded to rally him freely on his short hair and "Roundheady looks."

"'Pon my soul, friend," he spluttered, "when I caught sight of thy drab coat and cropped head, I thought some rogue of a rebel had been foisting his son upon me. Eh? What? You're a King's man, are you? That's right, or you wouldn't stay long here. What's your name? Jackson, eh? Well, Jack, my son, drink a pot to the King! To the King, I say! Wilt drink it, brother Roundhead!"

"Ay, brother toper, that will I!" said the King. And he clapped him on the back with a vigour which nearly sent his host toppling to the floor.

Mrs. Symons treated her husband's humour as one of the daily incidents of life. But she spared no effort to secure Charles' safety and comfort, while he rested in her house. At Hambledon he stayed securely, while Colonel Gunter sent urgent messages to Mansel, and made anxious enquiries for the promised ship upon the Sussex shore. Behind them once again the alarm had subsided. The authorities seemed to be wholly at a loss. And though a thousand rumours were set flying, no one could be found to have any accurate knowledge of the movements of the King.

One man alone among his enemies, by far the most pertinacious and keen-witted, had formed a clear conception of what Charles' course would be. Latour, it will be remembered, had intercepted Mansel's letter to Gunter at the Salisbury Inn, and when he found Charles turning his back

upon Southampton, he guessed at once that he would take Gunter's suggestion and make for some port on the Sussex coast. Of course he was bitterly annoyed at the failure of his own elaborate plan. Wilmot had been so completely hoodwinked—the crowning touch of art had been the production from the slums of Salisbury of the counterfeit French sailor to testify to Ellesdon's villainous designs, an expedient which did infinite credit to Latour's own ingenuity and to the agents whom he had at his command—and the plot all through had been so skilfully sustained, that he had counted implicitly on its success. But tenacity and resourcefulness were a part of the nature of the man. The failure of one scheme only sent off his mind at a bound to another, and ere he had half realized the keenness of his disappointment, his busy wits were hard at work making a fresh bid for success.

That night he slept at Southampton, and the next afternoon he was riding down the narrow streets of Chichester and enquiring for Mr. Francis Mansel, a merchant of that ancient, honourable town. He found Mr. Mansel's house, a good brick dwelling, hard by the Cathedral precincts and the stately market-cross, which still bore signs of the damage done to it by Waller's troops. But Mr. Mansel was unfortunately away from home. When would he be back? Oh, they hoped that evening. He had been called away suddenly on urgent business. No, they could not say where he had gone. Had Mr. Mansel received a messenger that morning? A messenger? The servant stared. He could not say. Finally, M. Latour decided to abstain from further questions, and left word that he would call again that evening on Mr. Mansel's return.

He spent the rest of the day in strolling about Chichester. He made careful enquiries as to the roads and harbours of

the district. He studied the maps of the adjacent parts of Sussex. He collected a good deal of information about Colonel Gunter's family, and the situation of their homes; and he ascertained that the nearest military force was then at Arundel, where the Governor of the Castle commanded a detachment of Parliamentary troops. Towards evening he found himself unoccupied, and wandering into the Cathedral sat for a while in the shadowy transept, revolving schemes of baseness strangely incongruous with the spirit of the place. Yet he came out with a chastened air not quite ignoble or assumed. Did something in the great church and the mysteries it stood for touch an element in the man's nature which he never acknowledged to himself? Who knows? Certainly M. Latour would have laughed at the question. So he went in to supper and then back again to Mansel's house.

The merchant had come home. He received his visitor with a certain stiffness, and checked at once any discussion as to his occupation during the day. But as he drew into himself, Latour expanded, and began to talk with such freedom of Colonel Gunter and his mysterious friends, that at last, after a stare or two, Mansel changed his tone and thawed completely, and the Frenchman saw that his distrust was overcome.

He laughed, the frankest laugh in the world, and drew a letter from his pocket. "You were inclined to distrust me, I know, sir," he said good-naturedly. "And quite right too. We can't be too careful, considering whose interests are involved." And he winked at him in the most confidential way.

The cheery old merchant could not resist the temptation to wink in reply.

"But you'll recognize that note," Latour continued,

handing to Mansel his own brief letter to Gunter written a week before, "and you'll understand that Colonel Gunter would not have passed it on to me, unless he had had reason to trust me, and had wished to convince you that he did."

"No, that seems clear," said Mansel. The letter was the best of introductions. "Then you know our plans?" he asked.

"All except the last details," said Latour, boldly. "And those I've come over to ask you, to carry back straight to the K——"

"Hush," interrupted the merchant, glancing round.

"Well, name no names," cried Latour gaily. "But at least you'll say with me 'God bless him'?"

"With all my heart, and we'll drink it too," said Mansel readily; and he rose and fetched glasses from a dresser on the wall. "But you haven't told me your name," he added, with a momentary access of caution, as he set the glasses down.

"Phelips," said Latour, with ready hardihood.

"Not Colonel Phelips?" cried the merchant with surprise.

"No, no; but a near relative, of the same stock and the same opinions."

"It's a good stock," said Mansel, "from all I hear of it, and I like its opinions too. Do you know I fancied for a moment there was a touch of something foreign in your talk?"

Latour laughed gaily. "You're not the first man who has told me so, and no wonder. I spent nearly twenty years of my life in France. You've seen the world too, Captain Mansel, and you know how easily one picks up foreign tongues."

"Oh, I'm no Captain," said the merchant modestly,

"though it's true I own a ship or two. But I've been abroad in my time, Mr. Phelps, as you suppose."

"One can't mistake it," murmured his companion. "Travel always gives a something, you know"—he laughed again so genially—"which a man of the world requires. However, I come here for business, Mr. Mansel, though your kindness makes me forget it. We have to help, remember, to get some other gentleman abroad."

"You're right," said Mansel. "Well, I think that's about settled. I've been busy all day with the arrangements, and have just sent off a messenger to Hambledon with the details."

"To Hambledon?" Latour was at fault at last.

"Yes, to Colonel Gunter. They sent over early this morning—" Mansel stopped suddenly. It was odd his visitor didn't know this. "Don't you come from Hambledon?"

"No, no," said Latour promptly, almost as if the question were absurd. "I came straight here from Salisbury, and I've not seen our friends since then. I was expecting to rejoin them at Racton;" he knew the name of Colonel Gunter's home.

"Ah, they've not got so far as Racton. No doubt that's why they sent another messenger across."

"Did he leave no word for me?" asked Latour with magnificent presumption.

"No, he didn't; at least I think not." Mansel was almost apologetic in trying to recollect. "But we had a good deal to talk of, and he was only a stable-hand."

"I wonder where I had better rejoin them?" Latour reflected. "They won't want any more of us at Hambledon, I imagine. And you don't think they'll come here?"

"No, I think not. I've advised them to keep along the downs inland."

"H'm!" said Latour; "Arundel's the place that I'm afraid of. There are those rebel soldiers there, you know." He wished to discover, if Arundel were on the route proposed.

"Yes, that's the riskiest point," assented Mansel. "But once past Arundel the way along the downs is clear."

"And you're all ready for them?"

"We shall be by Tuesday night."

"And the ship, you said, is to be at——?" Latour asked quickly. But the question came too sharply. The other man noted the sharpness, and instinctively though unconsciously drew back. He suspected nothing, but his caution suddenly returned.

"Well," he said, "I've sent all those details to Colonel Gunter. And perhaps its safer"—he glanced round again—"not to name names too much, even between ourselves."

Latour bit his lip, but one would have thought the sentiment was his own from the enthusiasm with which he adopted it and approved of it at once. When he left the merchant's house he knew all but the name of the ship and the name of the port they had fixed on, and as to the latter he had formed a shrewd guess. "It's so like a man of that kind," he reflected, "to tell one almost everything, and then to draw back at the last. It was luck intercepting that letter; but even without that introduction, I should have got out of him all I wished to know." To Hambledon alone he would not venture; besides Charles might have left there before now. But with his knowledge of the route, and with the troops at Arundel to assist him, he felt pretty confident that with the time at his disposal, he could make a bold effort to intercept the King.

Meanwhile Colonel Phelps and his two young companions had rejoined the fugitives. Colonel Phelps had led them straight to Hambledon, where he knew he was sure to learn something of Colonel Gunter's movements, and where to his delight he found the Colonel himself. And Charles was equally glad to see them and to hear of their capture and release by Macy, and of their encounter with Latour at the inn. He made Johnny go through the whole scene of his duping the Frenchman, and vowed it was a thousand pities that such dramatic talents should be thrown away. "Your appearance alone, Mr. Erle, would be worth an army to you, if you chose to set up your standard in any English shire."

"I would far sooner set up Your Majesty's," retorted Johnny with a smile.

"You're sure you've no taste for imposture?"

"I'm quite sure, sir, that I've none for being a King."

"And who can wonder, when my friends see what it means?" said Charles with sudden sadness. And Johnny, cursing himself for a clumsy blunderer, swore that to be known as the King's devoted servant was all the fame that his ambition desired.

At Hambledon, on the return of Colonel Gunter's messenger, they received details from Mansel as to the arrangements he had made. They learned that a certain Captain Nicholas Tettersall, the master of a small coal brig, had consented for the sum of sixty pounds to take on board two friends of Colonel Gunter's, and to set them down in France. They were to make their way on Tuesday, the 14th of October, along the Sussex downs to Brighthelmstone, a little fishing-village on the coast, and there, at the George Inn, Mansel and Tettersall would meet them, and conduct them after nightfall to the ship, which was to sail either

from Shoreham or from one of the adjoining creeks. At Hambledon, when these details were settled, Charles gave his last instructions to his friends. He parted from Dr. Henchman and sent him back to Salisbury, insisting laughingly that it was unbecoming in a prelate to go riding with desperate outlaws over the downs, and forcing the Doctor to confess that he had never felt so stiff in his life as the night when he had arrived at Hambledon in his Sovereign's train. The Doctor at first resisted, but finally yielded to Charles' wish.

"It is safer so, old friend," the King urged gently. "I shall not forget your care of me. But you must trust me to the others now."

He held out his hand. Dr. Henchman knelt and kissed it with an emotion that he rarely showed. And then stepping back, with a look of unwonted gentleness on his firm, strong face, he suddenly lifted his hands over the young man's head and blessed him with a solemnity of voice and gesture which no man in that little company listened to unmoved.

"Unto God's gracious mercy and protection we commit thee. The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace both now and evermore."

And all the listeners present said "Amen."

At Hambledon, too, the King bade good-bye to Phelps, sending him to London, to visit certain well-known Royalists there, and to raise money to be sent to him in France.

"You will come back, you will come back, sir," said Phelps almost passionately.

"Then I shall look for Robin Phelps to be among the first to welcome me," cried Charles, summoning all the

gaiety that he could muster, as the two faithful gentlemen withdrew.

"I envy you, Johnny, my boy," said Phelips, as he and the Prebendary started together; "you are to be with the King to the last."

"You should envy my complexion," said Johnny; "that's the reason. But I don't suppose you do."

"I envy you your young bones," said Dr. Henchman, whose gruff humour had returned by now, "and I shall expect you not to spare them when you ride home to report to me."

"Oh, I'll come fast enough, if all goes well," said Johnny, and with a tinge of sadness he watched the two familiar figures move slowly up the street.

It was thought safer for Johnny to stay with the King; in case of danger his appearance might be used to screen Charles' escape, as it had been before. Gunter and Wilmot were of course essential to the party, and the only other person permitted to join, in deference to John's entreaty, had been Hugh.

The night before they started, Mansel sent over to warn them to take special precautions in passing Arundel, for he had just heard of some movement on the part of the garrison there. But Mr. Phelips perhaps would keep them informed of that.

"Mr. Phelips?" said Wilmot doubtfully. "Phelips is half way to London now."

"He surely can't have gone to Chichester," said Gunter. "What has Mansel got to do with Phelips? It's a mystery."

"Well, I can't explain it," said Johnny. "But my general rule now is, whenever I smell a mystery, look for Latour."

"Latour! Why he's fled; or he's under arrest by this

time for the death of young Trenchard, I hope," said Wil-mot at once.

"Is he?" said Johnny, "I wonder." But as no one could enlighten him, and his companions were inclined to laugh at him, his wonderings remained unresolved.

In the sharp freshness of a bright October morning, with a blue haze lending height and distance to the hills, they started on their ride along the downs, rising as they went, till the thatched roofs and russet trees of Hambledon lay far behind them, and the Sussex country opened out in front. Riding on steadily, they crossed the Hampshire border near Stanstead Forest and my Lord Lumley's house, and leaving Racton, Colonel Gunter's house, unvisited, kept to the higher level of the hills, till Chichester spire rose out of the flats below them, and beyond it the shining spaces of the sea. Something of the freshness of those sunny waters passed into their faces as they moved along. The harassed, weary look, which Charles had worn again of late, had vanished, and hope and joyousness shone in his eyes instead. The cool air, the soft turf, the fine motion, the happy soli-tude of the ridges around them, and the great sweep of heaven above, lent courage and exhilaration to their course.

"That way lies Shoreham, sir," said Gunter, pointing into the hazy distance, as they surmounted a sharp incline.

Charles looked out to sea, where the specks of a white sail danced on the horizon. "Then that way, my friend," he said gaily, "lie safety and freedom for me."

In a hollow of the downs they dined and rested, finding a stream to refresh their horses and themselves. And still the wonderful silence of the hills encompassed them, and no intruder questioned their presence by so much as a stare. Now and again of course they encountered some one, a farmer riding down to Chichester, a girl with a basket cross-

ing the fields afoot, a labourer whistling at his work for gladness, or a blue-smocked shepherd-boy lazily watching his sheep. Once or twice, from the scattered farm-buildings with the yellow mosses on their roofs, women looked up and smiled to see the cavalcade go by. Curiosity and brief benignant interest they might arouse here and there. But the hours sped by, and of interruption they knew nothing, and the thought of danger seemed to be a dream.

They made a circuit to the North to avoid the bridge at Arundel, though the King, for his part, would have had them ride boldly through the town. But once they had left the Castle and its garrison behind them, the way seemed so clear, that their spirits rose irresistibly, and Charles' natural gaiety asserted itself in an outburst of talk. Riding between Wilmot and Gunter, he began telling them some story of a long ride that he had taken once in France. He told it with such a verve and humour that it absorbed the attention of his friends, and only Hugh and Johnny, who were behind and out of ear-shot, kept their attention and their eyes alert. Suddenly John touched Hugh on the arm, and pointed to the sky-line on their left. Hugh looked up but saw nothing, and turned a blank face towards his friend.

"Look again," said John, reining up for a moment, "there, by that clump of trees below the ridge."

They were riding along the top of a hollow sheltered from the sea, just below the rim of the downs which ran above them on their right. To their left the land fell to a valley, and beyond the valley another green ridge rose, on the slopes of which were a few farm-buildings, and higher still a group of scrubby wind-swept trees.

"I see the trees, but nothing else," said Hugh.

"No. They're hidden now. Ride on, and then turn round suddenly and look at those trees again."

Hugh complied. They overtook the others.

"Well?" said Charles, over his shoulder with a smile.

"Don't stop here, sir," Johnny answered. "But I think there's some one watching us from a clump of trees across the valley on the left. If you will ride on to that corner,"—pointing to a barn where the track turned, a short distance ahead—"we can look round and reconnoitre at our ease."

Charles nodded and the whole party moved forward sharply to the point indicated by John. But before they had got into shelter, Hugh's eyes had searched the suspicious clump again. "I see two or three horsemen, over there now," he said.

"What makes you think they're watching us?" asked Charles of John.

"The fact that they're hanging about those trees for shelter, sir, and that as soon as they saw I noticed them, they disappeared."

"Who are they then, do you imagine?"

"There's only one man I'm afraid of, sir, and that's Latour."

"Mr. Erle can't get Latour off his mind," said Wilmot, with a smile. But his eyes looked anxious.

"Latour is alone and discredited. What could he do now, even if it were he?" asked the King.

"Only warn the soldiers, sir, at Arundel. But he may have influence enough with the enemy still for that."

Charles thought for a moment, and then turned to Gunter. "What do you say, Colonel?"

"I think, sir, we can't be too careful. Ah, look, they're moving over there!"

The Royal party were now completely hidden from the watchers on the opposite ridge, and the latter may well have

thought that they had ridden on, for at the point where they were resting, their track dipped suddenly behind an elevation of the downs. Acting on this view, the waiting horsemen emerged boldly from the clump of scrubby trees, and rode hard for the ridge above them, plainly visible to the Cavaliers. Then they followed the horizon for a few moments, and finally disappeared upon the other side.

"We must go on all the same," said Charles decisively.
"Forewarned is forearmed; that is all."

And on they rode, but less light-heartedly, for the recollection of those two vagrant and observant horsemen lay heavy on their minds.

Gunter and Johnny now took the lead together and acted as a vanguard to the rest. Nevertheless nothing happened to disturb them till they had covered some further distance to the East. Then, winding out of a cleft, they came into a mighty grassy cup, and at the entrance Johnny turned suddenly and lifted up his hand to keep the others back.

At the edge of the cup, and guarding the ridges before them, a party of troopers were waiting, black against the sky.

CHAPTER XIX

THE END OF A TRAITOR

TURNING back to join their colleagues, Colonel Gunter and Johnny held a hasty consultation with the others at the corner of the ravine, out of sight of the troops on the ridge.

"They will hardly have seen us yet," said Johnny, "for we're in the shadow, while they're in the full sun."

"No, but they'll see us as soon as we get into the open," the King answered. "Now, gentlemen, what do you propose?"

"It may be a false alarm of course," said Wilmot, but there was no conviction in his voice.

"How would it do to venture it," Charles suggested, "and to ride boldly on."

"It's far too great a risk, sir," said Colonel Gunter hastily.

"Could we divide? It might be well for some of us to face it out," said John.

Charles turned to him. "Well, Mr. Erle, your advice is generally worth hearing."

Johnny rose to the occasion with a touch of pride. "I fear, sir," he said, "that those troops are waiting for us. If so, we shall not escape pursuit by turning back, and the only way to put them off the scent is for some of us to go boldly forward, as if we had nothing to conceal." Charles nodded his approval. "If Your Majesty would consent to turn back through the ravine with Lord Wilmot, and would make your way South towards the shore and on to Bright-helmstone, I would suggest that Hugh and I should ride on

with Colonel Gunter, and lead those fellows as far as possible afield. But we'll try to do that without appearing to avoid them, and no doubt, sooner or later they'll come up with us."

"And then?" asked the King.

"Then, sir, if, as I think possible Latour is with them, I believe I see my way to deal with him; and I should like the chance." Johnny felt in his pocket for something which he apparently found there. "Anyhow, they can have nothing serious against us, and Your Majesty would thus have time to get away."

"What do you say to this plan, Colonel Gunter?"

"I say, sir, that I would much rather stay with you."

"I'm afraid we can't do it without the Colonel," said Johnny with a smile. "Lord Wilmot must go with Your Majesty; we can't run the risk of his being caught. If they're really looking for you, sir, I want them to take my party for the King's, and they'll never do that, if it consists of only Hugh and me."

"I think he's right, Colonel," said the King slowly.

"You may trust me, Gunter," said Wilmot, "to lead His Majesty to the coast. Even if you didn't rejoin us, we could find Mansel and Tetersall ourselves."

"The officer in command of those troops will probably know Colonel Gunter's name," Hugh added; "and that will help to satisfy their suspicions, when they take us, as Johnny seems to have arranged."

"Yes, that's part of the game," said John.

"And the game is worth playing," said the King firmly, laying a hand on Gunter's shoulder as he spoke. "You'll try your hand at it, Colonel, if I ask you?"

Colonel Gunter yielded instantly. "Of course," he answered, "I'll do whatever Your Majesty commands."

So matters were decided. Charles and Wilmot parted from the others, and turned back on the track which they had been following, with a view to striking south towards the shore, as soon as an opportunity occurred. They promised each other with determined gaiety that they would meet at Brighthelmstone that night.

"Now, Johnny," said the Colonel pleasantly, "we're under your orders. Give us the word, and we'll obey."

"It makes just all the difference having you with us," Johnny answered gratefully; and side by side, putting Johnny in the middle, the three rode into the open with ostentatious unconcern.

Very soon the troops on the ridge in front caught sight of them, and put themselves in motion as if to intercept their course, and then Johnny, drawing a little ahead of his companions, to make himself conspicuous, turned sharply north, as if to lead the way inland. This movement caused surprise among the party of observation on the ridge, and some of them began to ride hastily in the same direction. But they were at once recalled by the officer in command.

"We'll get on, then," said Johnny, "all the faster," and, as he spoke he quickened his pace to a trot, which carried them rapidly across the open amphitheatre in front. At the further end, the track they were in swept round to the east, along a gentle valley from which the chalk slopes rose on either side.

"Oh, I see," said John; "this curves round eastwards, and they know that by waiting up there, they can command our course."

"That's it, no doubt," Colonel Gunter assented. "This track ought to bring us out by Bramber in a mile or two."

"That'll do for me," said Johnny. "Those fellows on

the right are following us along the ridge. I wonder if the slope upon our left is guarded too."

But almost as he spoke, a little group of horsemen came in sight upon the hill-line on their left, and also began to move eastwards, parallel with their party and with the troops upon the other ridge.

"Well, we're all going in the same direction," said Johnny laughing.

"They think that they've got us," said Hugh.

"It can't be doubted that they have," Colonel Gunter rejoined.

"In that case, we may take it easy," Johnny added. "The longer we are, the better;" and he fell to a walk again.

At this easy rate they proceeded down the valley, accompanied on either hand by troopers on the heights, who seemed content to follow and to watch them, without coming to closer quarters with their prey. To north and south their way was barred. Any attempt to turn back westwards would no doubt have brought the troopers down upon their heels. To the east the valley gradually narrowed, and there in their path, unknown to them but not quite unsuspected, the officer in command was concentrating the chief part of his force. He was waiting only to draw his net about them so closely that there could be no possibility of escape.

"We're riding straight into the lion's mouth, Johnny," said Colonel Gunter. He saw the horsemen on the heights converging and the valley which they occupied narrowing in front.

"I know, sir," said Johnny cheerfully, with a twinkle in his eye. "And if we can only take long enough about it, that's exactly what I meant to do."

But all things, even the pursuit of Princes, end. As they went on, the ridges lessened and the green slopes broadened out. They were passing through the downs and emerging into one of the happy, quiet villages which nestle at their feet. Suddenly the bend of a river shone before them, and the bridge and the roofs of Bramber came into sight. And almost as suddenly the troops round closed in.

"I have a plan, sir, may I try it?" asked John of the Colonel in a low voice.

"By all means; go ahead," the Colonel answered, and Johnny touched his horse with his spur.

The three Cavaliers bounded forward and rapidly neared the village and the bridge. As they did so, a couple of horsemen galloped forward on their right, to join the troopers who occupied the bridge, and Johnny, turning round in his saddle, caught a glimpse of their faces as they went by.

"It's Latour," he cried to his companions, "Latour! Ride at them!" And a race for the bridge ensued.

The positions of the two parties were curiously reversed. Each was making for the bridge, but the Cavaliers, having more ground to cover, were a little behind, and appeared to be pursuing the very men who for some time past had been closing in on them. Johnny chuckled; he loved to turn the tables on his foes.

"Stop, stop," he cried, raising himself in the saddle, as the two horsemen with their fresher horses forged ahead. His voice rang out so imperiously that one of the two looked back and hesitated for a moment, but the other urged him on. "Stop there, gentlemen," Johnny repeated. "In the name of the Commonwealth, stop!"

"Good Heavens!" muttered Colonel Gunter, as he stifled a laugh. "The devil quoting Scripture isn't in it with effrontery like that."

And the cry certainly puzzled the two riders. The foremost one, a fair soldierly man with a grave face, and with a touch of the dandy even in his simple Puritan dress, threw a startled look at his companion, and then, as he neared his men upon the bridge, reined up and faced anxiously round. But his companion had stopped already, and was staring, his head bent forward, his face grey with sudden consternation, at the fast-advancing Cavaliers.

“Where’s your King?” began the fair man hurriedly. But there was no time for explanation or reply, for with a thunder of hoofs Johnny and Hugh were upon them, with the Colonel close behind.

“Stand, stand!” shouted the fair man loudly, and within a yard or two of him the Cavaliers reined suddenly up. But Johnny’s horse was alongside of Latour’s, as he stopped it, and his hand was on Latour’s left arm.

“I arrest this man,” he cried boldly, in a voice that went echoing down the stream. “Hugh!”

And Hugh responding to a sign, edged forward and gripped Latour’s right arm as well.

It was none too soon. The Frenchman’s hand was already on his sword-hilt, and a look of baffled fury, almost indescribable in the concentrated malice it bespoke, had taken possession of his face. The troopers behind moved ominously. Swords were drawn, and the ranks closed in.

For a moment the commanding officer had been thrown off his balance by his amazement at the strange presumption of the scene. But he quickly recovered his faculties and his voice.

“Stand back, sir,” he said, addressing Johnny with dignity enough, “and leave hold of that gentleman at once.” Johnny obeyed, but Hugh kept his place at Latour’s right hand. “Before you venture to arrest men in my presence,

you had better be sure that you are not a prisoner yourself. I must know who you and your companions are."

Latour opened his mouth to speak, but was checked by the pressure of Hugh's grip upon his arm.

"I ask nothing better than to tell you, sir," Johnny answered with a fine dignity of his own. "I am speaking to the officer in command of this—detachment?"

"To Captain Morley, Governor of Arundel," said the fair man shortly.

Johnny bared his head, noticing as he did so, the Captain's eyes fixed in astonishment on his ill-cropped hair. "Then I am sure of a courteous hearing," he replied. "My name is Erle, John Erle, of Salisbury, and I am riding with Mr. Hugh Wyndham and Colonel Gunter of Racton, whom you may know, in pursuit of that rascally Frenchman, whom I denounce to you as a murderer and a spy."

He pointed to Latour as he ended; but Captain Morley was not thinking of Latour. He was eyeing every detail of Johnny's strange appearance—his hair, his hands, his dress, and his proportions, with an interest that he made no effort to conceal. He edged closer. "Who do you say you are?" he asked, and gazed again.

"John Erle of Virginia, now living in Salisbury, with my uncle who is a Canon there," said Johnny, almost wearily. "Oh, ask these gentlemen, ask any one who knows Salisbury. You'll have no difficulty in identifying me."

"You're strangely like—" the Captain began and stopped.

"Like the King of Scots? Of course; I know I am. I've been pestered to death by the resemblance already, and that scoundrel"—pointing to Latour again—"has been trying to make capital out of it for weeks. But he knows who I am as well as any one. Ask him, ask him, I say."

Morley turned sharply to Latour. "Who is he? Is it the King, as you supposed?"

Latour's face was a painful sight to see. "That," he hissed, his voice almost inarticulate with anger, "that riff-raff is no more the King than I!"

"Then," broke in the Captain, in a voice of thunder, "you've brought us all here on a fool's errand to-day."

"No, no," gasped Latour. "The King is somewhere near, I swear it. That impostor is one of his servants, got up to counterfeit him, and to screen his master with his masquerade and lies!"

Latour's voice rose almost to a scream, for Hugh felt justified in tightening his grip at each insulting word, and the Frenchman was almost beside himself with rage at Johnny's triumph and at the hopelessness of proving his own case.

Captain Morley's lip curled in contempt. He had with difficulty been prevailed on by Latour's representations to turn out his men and guard the downs that day. He had been very incredulous of the tale that Latour had brought him, and it had needed all the Frenchman's powers of persuasion, and all the authority of the recommendation from General Desborough which he had produced, to induce the Governor of Arundel to lend himself to his design. Then the advent of the expected party at the place and time foretold had seemed to verify the story and to justify the steps which he had taken. And Johnny's startling appearance, so curiously like the descriptions of the King, had given a fresh foundation to his hopes—a foundation only to be rudely shattered by Johnny's still more startling conduct, when brought to bay. But Latour's wild and unintelligible explanations destroyed Morley's last vestige of belief in him.

"I can assure you, sir," said Colonel Gunter, speaking for the first time, with a quiet confidence which had its effect, "that my friend, Mr. Erle, for whose identity I can answer, is no impostor and has told you no lies. I am Colonel Gunter of Racton, and shall be glad to answer any questions as to my doings that you like to ask. It is not my friend's fault that he bears, I believe, some resemblance to King Charles. He has never to my knowledge pretended to be anything but what he is."

"God forbid that I should ever be a King," said Johnny, with such fervour that a faint smile showed on Captain Morley's face.

"Then may I ask, Colonel Gunter, what you are doing here?" he enquired.

"I think Mr. Erle told you," the Colonel answered quietly, "that he had some business to settle with this person Latour. Mr. Hugh Wyndham and I are here to support Mr. Erle. It will not I suppose require much explanation that on a day like this I should be riding on the downs within a few miles of my home."

Captain Morley had nothing to answer, but Latour broke out afresh. "Captain Morley, are you going to swallow all the glib lies these fellows pour down your throat? I tell you that they are all conspirators, every one of them, hand and glove with this runaway King. Even now, while you stand there drinking in their insolence, they are laughing in their sleeves at you, and the King whom you might be pursuing, is making good his escape under your nose."

Johnny trembled, as he listened, at the shrewdness of the man's guesses, at the startling accuracy of his description of the facts. But no man likes to be told he is a dupe, and on Captain Morley the warning made no more impression than water splattered on a wall. He turned to John.

"You denounced this man," he said coldly. "Are you prepared to make your denunciation good?"

"I am," said John.

"Then I'll hear it," said Morley. "Wait." He raised his hand and gave some order to the troops. Two men fell in on each side of Latour, and one took his bridle. The Frenchman's eyes blazed.

"Do you dare?" he began, then controlled himself. "Captain Morley, do you mean to listen to loose charges brought against me by rebels caught red-handed, who ought to be in prison themselves?"

"I have enquired into your story, M. Latour," said Morley slowly, "and have found it—incorrect."

"You have not? You have been duped—" screamed the Frenchman, but the Captain went quietly on. "I am now going to enquire into theirs."

He led the way across the bridge, the troopers opening their ranks before him, and closing in again behind the party, so that no one could escape. A small inn leaned into the street upon the other side, and this the Governor, after dismounting, entered, and marched up-stairs. In a few minutes Johnny and his companions found themselves in a fair-sized room which occupied the whole of the first floor of the little house, the window of which looked down upon the troops drawn up in the space outside the tavern front. Morley seated himself at a table; the three Cavaliers stood on his right hand; Latour by the window opposite, and some soldiers at the door. Then he asked for pen and paper and wrote down the names and addresses of Colonel Gunter and Johnny and Hugh.

"Gunter and Wyndham, both disaffected names," he commented, and then he turned to Johnny. "Now, Mr. Erle," he added, "what complaint have you against this

man? Wait"—as Johnny began to answer—"you denounced him as a murderer and a spy. That is strong language. Can you make it good?"

"I think I can," said John.

"Go on, then!"

"First of all, I charge him with being a spy. He is a Frenchman, working in the interests of the Cardinal Mazarin, for purposes I don't profess to understand."

"And your proof of this?"

"That," said Johnny, drawing out a little wisp of paper from his vest and laying it on the table. It was Mazarin's note which Julia had captured and given to Johnny after the scene at Heale.

Latour uttered an exclamation of surprise. Morley took the little note, and smoothed it out and read it and examined the seal. "I understood you to be an agent of General Desborough, M. Latour," he said. "It would seem from this letter that you enjoy the confidence of the Cardinal Mazarin as well."

"The Cardinal is a true friend to the Commonwealth of England," Latour answered. His self-control had returned. He had recovered to some extent from his disappointment, and was now warily fighting for himself.

"No doubt. How did you get this, Mr. Erle?"

"He stole it," said Latour quickly.

"No," Johnny answered. "It was picked up by accident; M. Latour must have dropped it unawares."

"Where?"

"At Mr. Coventry's house in Salisbury."

"You keep doubtful company, Mr. Erle."

"Oh, I'm an American," said Johnny readily. "But it's true that most of my friends are on the losing side." The Captain did not seem to resent this candour, and Johnny

went on. "But remember, sir, it was in this Royalist company that M. Latour introduced himself as a friend."

"A friend!" sneered Latour. "Captain Morley, am I to be allowed to repudiate these falsehoods and to defend myself?"

"Presently," said the Captain. "I have first to hear the charge." And he nodded to Johnny, whose indictment flowed rhetorically on.

"I assert that M. Latour is a French spy, who came to Salisbury and introduced himself to Royalist gentlemen as a friend; that, having won their confidence he denounced them, and got more than one of them arrested by the troops; that only last week he had me made prisoner near Salisbury, Heaven knows on what charge, for I was released by the officer in command at once; and that all his dealings have been full of tricks and treachery to which only a spy and a scoundrel would descend."

"Yes," said Morley coldly, "and what about the other charge?"

"The other charge," said John slowly, "is this. Last week, at the Feathers Inn, on the road from Salisbury to Romsey, he killed my old friend and school-fellow, Tom Trenchard. They may have fought; I don't know; no one saw them. But I do know that he left him dead upon the floor and ran away."

"It was a duel, a fair fight —" Latour began. But his voice shook slightly and his nerve was less.

"Trenchard, did you say?" asked the Captain, looking hard at John.

"Yes, Tom Trenchard, Sir Thomas' nephew. That at least is not a disaffected name."

"Far from it," said Morley; the Trenchards' influence with the new Government was well known.

"On that count," Johnny pressed his point, "I ask you to arrest him as a fugitive from justice here."

The Captain leaned over the table towards Latour. "What have you to say to this?" he asked him.

"I deny the charge," Latour said boldly. He was master of his voice again. After all, he had reflected, neither Gunter nor Hugh had been there. It was only John's word against his own. "I admit the quarrel and regret it; Mr. Trenchard lost his temper and attacked me, and we fought. I inflicted a slight wound on him, but he is as well as I am to-day."

"Why I saw him dead," cried Johnny hotly.

Latour smiled with disdainful self-control. "Mr. Erle's imagination grows quickly," he said. "Every man who slips on to the floor for a moment doesn't necessarily die. And Mr. Erle could hardly have seen much of the duel, as he was a prisoner in another room at the time."

His calm impressed the Governor far more than his anger and abuse had done. Morley turned to John. "Have you any proof of that?" he asked.

"Proof!" cried Johnny. "Why all the world knows it," and he looked at his friends.

"I certainly heard of Mr. Trenchard's death," said Gunter; "but I wasn't there."

"Nor I," said Hugh unwillingly, in response to the Governor's glance.

"You see, Captain Morley," Latour broke in triumphantly, "you see what this venomous charge is worth."

The Governor of Arundel sat silent for a moment considering his course. He distrusted Latour instinctively, profoundly, but on the other hand Johnny was evidently biased; his charge was uncorroborated; it might rest on a mistake. The truth is, in the duel between the Virginian and the

Frenchman, Captain Morley, who knew little of either, felt very much at sea. Clearly Johnny and his friends were Royalists, and for aught he knew, conspirators as well. Just as clearly, they had a long-standing feud with Latour, for the rights and wrongs of which he cared little; but the death of a near relative of Sir Thomas Trenchard of Wolverton, one of the leading supporters of the Government in the West, was not, if it had really happened, a thing to be ignored. He was half tempted to treat the whole party as equally open to suspicion and arrest. But there was a vein of Puritan equity in him, which made him anxious to decide if possible which side was right and which was wrong.

While he hesitated, the others stood round him silent, Johnny burning with anger at Latour's effrontery, just as a few minutes before Latour had been at his; Hugh watchful, interested, and considerably amused; and Colonel Gunter well contented as the time sped on and he thought of the chance which this long delay gave to the King. By the large open window Latour waited, resourceful and unconquered still, his quick brain even now scheming as to the possibility of renewing his pursuit of Charles, his restless eyes glancing now to Morley's stern, impassive face, and now through the window to the scene below. The troopers outside had scattered and were straggling in loose order over the open space before the inn. The horses from which Latour and the others had dismounted were standing tethered by the door. Somewhere at that moment between them and the sea, Latour felt certain, was the fugitive King. Somewhere along that coast-line, at Shoreham probably, even now the ship was waiting to take him on board. He saw through Johnny's ruse completely; it was the same trick that they had played on him before. It was maddening

that it should triumph so completely. It was maddening that the prize for which he had laboured so hard, manœuvred so adroitly, should escape him when it was there within his grasp. If he could only get away, astride that horse to Shoreham, he would baffle his enemies and secure it yet. If—that was the question, this awkward business of young Trenchard's death was an unforeseen embarrassment. But he had met it well. Did Morley believe him? He glanced at the Governor again.

Suddenly the Captain pushed back his chair and rose. "This is not a matter," he said, "on which I can decide. M. Latour, you must submit to an enquiry."

"Willingly," said Latour bravely, though his face grew whiter, as he spoke. "I place myself at your disposal and will surrender when and where you please. All I ask now is a few hours of freedom to pursue the King."

"Nonsense," said Captain Morley roughly. "That game is played out." He had lost all belief in that part of the story at least.

"I tell you I am certain," Latour persisted, "that King Charles is within a few miles of us still."

"Enough of that," said the Governor shortly.

"You take a heavy responsibility, Captain Morley. All I ask is a few hours' leave to convince you that I am right."

"I should take a heavier responsibility," Morley answered, "if I let you go off now on a wild-goose-chase without answering the grave charge brought against you here."

"But I will return, Captain Morley; I swear it."

"You will not go, sir," the Governor's voice had grown peremptory and hard.

"You refuse then, finally?" Latour's eyes measured the window beside him.

"I refuse finally. You are under arrest,"

As the Captain spoke, and Colonel Gunter breathed a sigh of relief at his decision, Latour laid one hand on the open window-sill, and boldly leaped from the window to the ground. It was a daring jump, but he alighted safely, stumbled forward, then rose, and seized the bridle of one of the horses waiting there. To set it loose, to throw himself across it, and to spur it forward, were the work of an instant.

“Stop him, stop him!” shouted Captain Morley from the window, laying a firm hand on Johnny’s shoulder, as he was just preparing to leap through the window after Latour. “No; by the stairs there; follow him!” And in an incredibly short time Johnny and Hugh were in the street.

Latour was through the troopers round the door before they had awakened to the fact of his escape, and his horse was bounding forward to the bridge. But on the bridge a couple of soldiers were posted, and one of them, alerter than his fellows, dashed forward, sword in hand. Latour’s horse swerved to the left. With a curse the Frenchman spurred him fiercely and pulled him sharply round to the right, and the horse, confused and frightened, perhaps mistaking his rider’s intent, rose suddenly at the low parapet before him and leaped over the side.

Down into the stream went horse and man together, on to the slippery stones beside the bridge, down into the water, plunging, falling, and then, after a desperate struggle, lying still. The horse’s back was broken. The rider was pitched forward violently on his head. In another instant his face had been dashed against the stonework of the bridge, and in that instant his daring energies had been extinguished and all his busy, restless schemes had died. Among the first, out-racing even the troopers, Johnny was

on the bank and in the water, helping to bring the broken figure to the shore, helping to lay out the lifeless limbs beside the roadway, to lift the bruised head, to chafe the hands in vain. Before he rose, Captain Morley was kneeling beside him, and Colonel Gunter, with all an old soldier's eagerness to help a wounded man, was essaying every remedy he knew.

But it was plain that no help was availing. With awful suddenness Latour had gone to his account.

The Captain issued directions, and the troopers brought a stretcher and carried the body to the inn. "Whatever his faults, he was a brave man," said Morley, as he followed it.

"Yes, he was brave, very brave," said Johnny ungrudgingly. There at least was a common ground where praise was due and censure could be dumb.

When they reached the inn, Captain Morley asked the three Cavaliers to follow him in.

"Mr. Erle," he said gravely, "standing by this dead man's body, I appeal to you to tell me the truth. The serious charge you made against him —" and he paused.

"On my honour, Captain Morley," said Johnny, "that charge was true. I saw Tom Trenchard lying dead upon the floor. I saw it, beyond doubt or question. He was not only wounded, but dead."

"Then he lied, when he told us Trenchard had recovered?"

Johnny was silent. Then he added slowly, "But I did not see the duel, and it may have been done in fair fight."

The Captain nodded. "There will have to be an enquiry into both deaths," he said; "and I shall want your evidence."

"We are at your disposal, Captain Morley," said the Colonel promptly. But in his heart he was praying hard that the Captain would not insist on detaining them then.

Morley reflected a moment. "You are at Racton?" he said.

"I return there to-morrow," said the Colonel boldly. "With your permission I will ride to Shoreham to-night. But I go home to-morrow and I pledge my honour that these two gentlemen shall stay there with me till we hear from you again."

"I give my word to wait at Racton for any summons you may send us, sir," said John.

"And I give mine," added Hugh.

The Governor's grave eyes ran along their faces. "That is enough. Then I need not keep you now," he said.

How Johnny's heart leaped at the decision; how he smiled at the ring of gladness in the Colonel's voice, as Gunter stepped forward and offered his thanks and his formal farewell. How bright the sun shone when they came out from the dark inn parlour! How sweet freedom tasted, after even an hour of arrest! They wasted no time now in mounting their horses. Without a word spoken between them they rode over the bridge, and unmolested took the road towards the shore. It was not till they were some distance from Bramber that they drew rein and gave vent to their feelings. Then Colonel Gunter leaned over from his saddle and held out his hand.

"Johnny," he said, "I want to shake hands with you. You've done more than any man of us to save the King."

And Johnny's dark face flushed a splendid crimson, as he took the Colonel's tribute and his hand. Then he

turned to look round and pointed to the rim of downs behind.

The sun was sinking, but it still caught the hilltops and illumined what was moving on the heights. The Governor of Arundel was returning home. And in the centre of the troopers who escorted him, four men on foot were carrying a bier.

CHAPTER XX

IN SIGHT OF THE SEA

COLONEL GUNTER redeemed his promise to Captain Morley by riding to the outskirts of Shoreham, a port which in those days enjoyed much more importance than it can be said to claim in these. But all the while he was longing to press on to Brighthelmstone, and to recover traces of the King. One of the horses cast a shoe and that detained them, and while they waited, Johnny would have liked to make enquiries for Tattersall in the town. But the Colonel would not hear of John showing his suspicious features in the streets of Shoreham. "No news," he argued reasonably, "is good news. If the King had been captured, we should hear of it fast enough. The ship's master won't be here, for Brighthelmstone is the meeting-place we fixed on;" and so, on to Brighthelmstone, along the shore and in the dark they went.

At Southwick they crossed the Adur, which here flows out into the sea, and there in a creek on their right John spied a small vessel, a small coal-brig, lying dark against a silver panel in the sky. Without a word to the others, he slipped behind and rode a few paces towards the beach. A boy was standing by the edge of the water calling to a sailor at work upon the ship.

"Fine night," said Johnny, accosting him.

"Oh, fine enough, but dark," said the boy.

"Your ship?" asked Johnny, with a nod towards the vessel.

The boy grinned. "Mine and my mates'," he answered. "But they haven't asked me to be master yet."

"What's her name?" asked Johnny, ignoring his humour.

"The *Surprise*, of Shoreham, Captain Tetersall."

"Ah!" said Johnny, "Captain on board her?"

"No; he's gone to Brighthelmstone, to drink my health," replied the boy.

There are hints which it is not possible to ignore.

"I dare say you could drink mine here?" said Johnny.

"No trouble at all, sir," the boy assured him genially as he baptized the proffered coin.

The Colonel was waiting for Johnny, his annoyance visible even in the meagre light. "Can anything be gained by gossiping here?" he enquired.

"I thought you would like to know that Captain Tetersall had gone on to Brighthelmstone," Johnny answered suavely, "and that that is his vessel waiting there."

"You don't mean it," said the Colonel quickly, and he swung round in his saddle and looked eagerly back to the brig.

"I don't think anything would be gained by staying to gossip further," observed Johnny severely, and with a laugh they all rode on to Brighthelmstone.

The little place lay still and peaceful, its boats drawn up in ranks along the shore, its black-roofed fisher-huts descending almost to the white edges of the surf, its lonely church, rising above them, and beyond it the sentinel windmills on the cliff. Most of the houses were dark already and their occupants asleep, but the lights of the George Inn still shone merrily, as Colonel Gunter and his party rode up quietly to the door. The Colonel asked for sup-

per and a private room. As he spoke there came from above a ring of laughter. "You have other visitors?" he asked.

"Oh yes, sir. Mr. Mansel of Chichester, and two or three gentlemen with him."

"Mr. Mansel! That's the very man I was hoping to find here."

"Will you join them, sir? They're having supper now."

"I should have no objection, if you wish it, Colonel," volunteered Johnny in a lofty vein.

The landlord raised the candle in his hand and stared at him. "There's a gentleman," he said, "I think it must be your brother, sir, with them." And then he stared uneasily again.

"Brothers have I none," said John with rapid flippancy, to cover the Colonel's sigh of thankfulness which was audible to all.

The landlord led the way up-stairs. In a little parlour, seated round a table, with Mansel at the head, were Charles and Wilmot, chatting with a tanned and grizzled seaman, as intimately as if their lives had been spent upon the sea. For an instant, as the door opened, the Colonel stood there, watching, with a dimness in his eyes that he could not control, relief and pity, love, loyalty, and exultation struggling in his heart. Then he turned, with commendable coolness towards Mansel.

"I am glad to find you, Mr. Mansel," he said heartily. "I hope I don't intrude upon your friends."

"Not at all, not at all," said Mansel rising. "Let me present you, Colonel. This is Mr. Barlow," indicating Wilmot, "and this Mr. Jackson"—pointing to the King. "Our good friend Captain Tetersall you have met already. He's going to set these gentlemen in France." And Mansel

nodded and winked in the most confidential manner, while all the little company shook hands.

“What have you done with Latour?” whispered Charles to Johnny.

“He’s dead, sir,” Johnny answered. “It was an accident.” He had no time for more, for as he talked to Charles all eyes in the room were fixed instinctively upon the pair. Charles saw it and broke into a laugh.

“You are wondering, Captain Tetersall, why I should want to get across the seas, when I can find a double so handy to bear the burden of my sins?”

The Captain drew a long breath as he finished his stare. “It’s a wonderful likeness, sir,” he answered enigmatically, “but I could always tell which is master and which is man.”

A momentary silence fell upon the little party. Charles dropped the subject hurriedly and as hurriedly Colonel Gunter broke in.

“We passed your ship at Southwick, Captain Tetersall.”

“Yes, I left her there to wait for the tide; she’s bound for Poole with coal, you understand.”

“I understand,” said Gunter, “but if the wind should take you out to sea, there’s no knowing where you might call on the way.”

“The wind, aye, that’s what we’re wanting,” the Captain answered doubtfully. “But it’s been off the sea for four-and-twenty hours.”

Charles moved to the window and leaned out. When he drew in his head again his eyes were shining. “Captain Tetersall,” he said, “the wind has changed.”

“Too good to be true, sir,” the Captain grunted.

“It is, though; it’s blowing from the north,” the King persisted.

“ Sou’west, sou’west ; it’s been sou’west all day ; ” the seaman shook his head. But he went to the window. Then after a long pause he turned towards the room again. “ I believe you’re right, sir,” he said slowly. “ It has shifted, and there’s a light breeze rising in the north.”

“ Hurrah ! ” cried Johnny, thumping on the table ; then overcome by his own want of discretion, he buried his head in bread and cheese again.

“ Then we can sail at once,” said the King exultingly.

“ Oh, we must wait for the tide,” demurred Tattersall.

“ But at least,” said Gunter, “ these gentlemen could go on board to-night.”

“ Well, there are the men to be told. They’re all about the place. I must get ’em together.”

The Captain was not to be hurried in his ways.

Ultimately, however, it was arranged that at two in the morning the fugitives should make their way towards the ship. Colonel Gunter and Mansel settled the details with the Captain, Tattersall trying to get a bond for his money from the Colonel, and raising one or two small difficulties, which Charles’ good-humoured interposition overcame. Towards Charles the seaman’s manner was emphatically gracious ; to the rest rather stiff and indifferent ; but to Mansel it had suddenly become surly in the extreme. The King watched him anxiously all the evening, and when he talked of going off to finish his preparations, broke in with fresh offers of beer and tobacco, and insisted on keeping Tattersall by him.

“ Don’t let him go home to his wife, for Heaven’s sake,” he whispered to Gunter. The fate of Stephen Limbry was still vivid in his mind.

But as the night wore on, it became evident that Tattersall must go and look after his crew ; and Gunter begged

Charles, who was growing very sleepy,—for he had been in the saddle and in the open air all day—to take an hour or two of rest before they started for the ship. Mansel, at Charles' entreaty, followed Tettersall, when the Captain left the inn; but before leaving the old seaman took Charles' hand and pressed it hard.

"I trust you, my friend. You won't let us be taken," said the King kindly, with all the charm which no man better could assume.

"Not I, sir," said the Captain stoutly. "Before we're taken, I'll run my boat under the sea."

But when they got into the street he turned on Mansel and emptied on him the vials of his wrath. "Do you think you can throw dust in my eyes, Mr. Mansel, with your stories of merchants and duns? You've not dealt fair with me in this matter —"

"Indeed I have," said the merchant startled, "fairly and squarely, as any man could wish."

"You've not dealt fair with me," Tettersall repeated. "Why couldn't you make a clean breast of it all?"

"Clean breast of what?" asked Mansel astonished.

"Why, of all this business. That's the King. I know it."

"The who?" cried Mansel, affrighted, pulling up sharply in the silent street.

"The King, I say the King; I know him."

"Nonsense, man!"

"No, it is not nonsense. You don't get over me again! That dark fellow's the King. I know him. He took my fishing boat prisoner when he was with the fleet in '48! And he let us all go free again, God bless him; and God help me, I'll let him go free to-night."

There was nothing for it but to admit the truth, and the

truth once admitted, the old seaman's surliness vanished like a mist before the wind. He hurried round and routed up his seamen, and sent them off grumbling to the ship. He roused his wife, and called for his kit and his brandy ; and she, so far from standing in his way, by some strange guess divined his mission, and bade him risk all to save the King. Charles' star was once more in the ascendant, and no discovery or misadventure could now interrupt the triumph of his plans.

Meanwhile at the inn he had been recognized again. The King was standing after supper by the parlour fire, his hand resting on a chair, his eyes gazing down into the flames, when the landlord entered and began to remove the supper things. Wilmot and Gunter and John were in the next room making up a bed for him, and Hugh was watching at the window, his back towards the door. Suddenly the landlord left the table, and stepping up behind the King, kissed the hand that was lying on the chair. Charles turned round suddenly.

“ It shan’t be said, but I have kissed the best man’s hand in England,” whispered the landlord with a smile.

Charles drew back his hand in some perplexity.

“ I don’t ask who you are, sir, but I don’t doubt now before I die that I shall be a lord and my wife a lady.”

His look of importance was so comical that the King irresistibly laughed. Suddenly the rough fellow’s humour changed ; his eyes filled quickly ; and he caught Charles’ hand and pressed it to his lips again. “ God bless you, whoever you are, whithersoever you go,” he stammered, and then turning, he fairly bolted from the room.

Hugh wheeled round as the door closed sharply, and his glance interrogated the King.

Charles’ expression was unusually gentle. “ Our secret

is more widely known than I had thought, Hugh," he said quietly, "and thank God, safer too."

Between two and three in the morning, Colonel Gunter, who with the boys had been keeping watch, awoke the King and his companion, and reinforced by Tattersall and Mansel, the little party set out for the last time. The horses were brought round to the back. Very quietly they mounted and rode along the shore towards the creek where the *Surprise* was lying. The wind was still favourable, but the tide was not yet in; so Charles and Wilmot, crossing the mud, climbed up a ladder, to wait in the ship's cabin till the water should rise and float them away. To Mansel the King said good-bye upon the shore, but Gunter and the two boys entreated leave to follow him on board. And there, in the little cabin, as the King sat on his truckle-bed, with Wilmot standing behind him, and the master of the ship walking up and down the deck outside, the three gentlemen knelt and prayed a blessing on him, and with tears that no fear of shame could stifle bade their Sovereign a last good-bye.

"You will come again, sir, you will come again." The broken assurance of undying loyalty and touching faith was more eloquent than any vows.

"If I do, God grant that I may find again in England such noble hearts, such courage, and such friends."

The King's dark eyes shone with very real emotion. The harder lines had faded from his face. The weariness had left it, and a certain rare nobility had taken possession of its place.

"I can't say anything I want to," Johnny stammered, with something very like a sob.

Charles smiled and laid a hand with tender humour on the dark head so like his own.



THE ESCAPE

"I think I can interpret, Johnny," he said gently; and then with one firm clasp all round, they rose.

Slowly, one by one, down the side of the little dusty vessel, where the tiny crew were busy already cleaning the decks from the black traces of the coal, and still more slowly back towards the shore they went. Mansel was guarding the horses. No other figure broke the solitude. No noise or peril, except the great sea washing and the low wind blowing on the flats, broke the chill silence or gave them an excuse to wait. Slowly they turned their horses' heads inland, and rode towards a copse upon the hillside, whence unobserved, they could yet keep a distant watch upon the creek. And there, till the stars died and the dawn succeeded, weary but sleepless and unconsoled, they stayed.

Meanwhile on board the little vessel the King woke after a refreshing sleep, and with the morning, Tettersall came to him, and, kneeling, told him his suspicions and swore to set him safe in France. Then he besought him to give the crew some explanation of his presence, and Charles and Wilmot went among the sailors, and told them they were merchants who had had misfortunes and were a little in debt, and afraid of arrest if they stayed at home. They begged the sailors to land them near Dieppe or some French port. They offered them twenty shillings to drink their health. "Upon which," says the King in his narrative, "they undertook to second me, if I would propose it to the master. And of course the master proved not too difficult to persuade."

It was seven o'clock before the tide served and the little vessel, her sails set and the breeze behind her, stood out at last to sea. Then suddenly the sun broke through the black clouds of the morning, and the watchers on the hillside

caught the glimpse of a white handkerchief fluttering from the stern. Tearing off his white cravat, the Colonel bound it on his scabbard, and waved it with both hands in the air. Presently, as the vessel moved away, the signal ceased to flutter, and lowering his pennon also, the Colonel set his face towards the downs. In silence the little party began to climb again the green hillsides and to make their weary way westwards, retracing their footsteps of the day before. But ever and again they stopped to look back lovingly upon the little vessel off the shore, which was setting her course apparently towards the dim line of the Isle of Wight. As the morning went on, they parted from Mansel, who returned to Chichester alone, the rest preferring to keep upon the higher levels, to watch till the last moment the progress of the brig. And all day long as they moved westwards, till the hills above Racton came in sight, they could see the ship still plainly visible, though her white sails had dwindled to a speck. It was not till late in the afternoon that she changed her course to the southward and fairly turned her head to France; and then all of a sudden she dropped below the horizon and vanished completely from the watchers' view.

“Johnny, Hugh, can you see her?” cried the Colonel, appealing to their younger eyes.

“No, she's gone at last,” said Hugh after a long moment. And satisfied that where Hugh's eyes failed, no other eyes would find her, his companions accepted his verdict and with sorrowful thankfulness bent their steps down-hill.

Next morning, Thursday, the 16th of October, Charles landed safely at Fécamp. A fortnight later after a brief stay at Rouen, he met his mother and the Duke of Orleans before Paris, and a brilliant company of French and English nobles bore him, in sympathy if not in triumph, through the city gates.

Colonel Gunter and the two boys waited at Racton till they heard from the Governor of Arundel again. But the enquiry into the death of Latour proved a simple matter, and they were immediately summoned to give evidence at Salisbury, where the death of young Trenchard had created a much more serious stir. Long before Charles had left Rouen for Paris, Johnnny had found his way to Dr. Henchman's house, and had given to an absorbed, admiring listener a vivid account of all that they had done, of the ride along the downs, the scene at Bramber, and the last hours together upon the shore. The little colony of Royalists at Salisbury made a hero of Johnnny in those days. Hugh, who went on to Trent to tell the story, brought back his father to share in the rejoicings of their friends. Mrs. Coventry kept open house in the Close, and Mrs. Hyde and Julia Coningsby came in from Heale to stay. Willie Ellesdon, released on giving guarantees for good behaviour, was lodged at Canon Erle's with his cousin, though he spent most of his time in wandering—not alone, it was inferred—about the Close. When at last a belated message came to them from Poole, where Captain Tetersall and his coal-brig ultimately arrived, to tell of the King's safe landing at Fécamp, the delight of the Cavaliers found vent in a supper at Mr. Coventry's hospitable house, where such bold toasts were drunk, and such high hopes indulged in, that the citizens of Salisbury gathered in wonder under the windows, and the host received a warning from the authorities that he would do wisely to keep his guests and his opinions within bounds.

But amid all this rejoicing, in the midst of her own deep happiness, Julia Coningsby carried a load upon her heart. It had fallen to her to comfort, so far as sympathy and tenderness could comfort, the beautiful girl who had given Tom Trenchard her love. With Rose, Julia shared her desolat-

ing grief. For Rose, she begged permission from the authorities to see only for the last time, the dead boy's face, with its roughnesses so strangely softened, its weaknesses so strangely dignified by death. With Rose, when the funeral was over—a funeral where the grim old squire, Peter Trenchard, and his more famous brother, Sir Thomas of Wolverton, found themselves in the unwonted company of many Cavaliers—Julia visited the new-made grave beside the yew-tree, and waited with compassionate gentleness till the girl's outbreak of despair had passed. To Rose, when she left Salisbury, she offered a resting-place to dwell in, and years afterwards Julia's children, as they grew up in their fair home among the Western hills, learned to carry all their pains and troubles, with the certainty of sympathy and help, to the sad-eyed woman who still possessed Rose Limbry's beauty and bore Rose Limbry's name.

Miss Coningsby's other trouble came nearer home, and happily it was more easily removed. Latour's death had destroyed his evidence against Ellesdon, and the Justices soon decided that there was no ground for detaining him. But so long as there remained the least slur upon her lover's honour, so long as that villainous paper offering Ellesdon a reward for Charles' capture remained unexplained, Julia could not rest.

To Johnny at Heale she had given it, and from Johnny she got it back. And then, consulting no one except Dr. Henchman, she boldly went off with the Doctor to Captain Macy's lodging, asked for an interview, and laid the paper before the astonished soldier's eyes.

The Captain was amazed at the visit, but by no means insensible to the sex or charm of his guest. He received her with a laughing politeness, which might easily have degenerated into freedom, had not Dr. Henchman been wait-

ing in the outer room, and had not Miss Coningsby's manner forbidden a nearer approach. But the frankness with which the girl told her story—the Prebendary wisely left it all to her—the touching courage with which she appealed to Captain Macy to clear the honour of the man she loved, reached what was best in the rough soldier's heart. Besides, when he remembered the circumstances, he felt a little ashamed at having allowed himself to be made the tool of Latour. The Frenchman was dead and discredited. Against Ellesdon he had no personal grudge. When Julia bade him good-bye, she carried with her the Captain's written acknowledgment that Ellesdon was blameless in the matter, and that the reward for Charles' betrayal had been promised to Latour alone. Before night, that acknowledgment, with a letter to explain it, had been forwarded to the King's friends in London for transmission to Charles in France. And before many days were over, there arrived from Paris, through mysterious channels, a brief note of thanks from the King, addressed to Miss Coningsby only, but confessing, in the handsomest manner which a cipher permitted, Charles' deep debt of gratitude to "the brave and loyal gentleman and lady" who had laboured so devotedly and risked so much for him.

Time passed. The wheel of fortune worked its revolutions. The exile, whose perilous flight our friends had sheltered, returned amid the transports of his people to mount his father's throne, to imperil it by faults and follies rarely equalled, to retain it by his dexterous reliance on a loyalty sorely tried but never quite worn out. Of the old acquaintances, whose fidelity to him in his time of trouble had been so finely proved, Charles was not unmindful in his day of triumph, and most of the actors in that brief romantic drama received a present, a picture, a pension, or

some other memento of the King. It was only an inevitable incident of His Majesty's financial system that the installments of the pensions promised were irregularly paid, so that poor Mr. Mansel was found once by Pepys near starving in a London tavern, and Colonel Gunter's estate never thoroughly recovered from the loans advanced by it for the Royal cause.

Once, in those later days, the Ellesdons visited London, carrying in their party Hugh Wyndham and his newly-married bride. They had a gracious, almost a merry interview with their Sovereign at Whitehall; but their loyal eyes refused to do homage to any lady present save the Queen, and perhaps in consequence they saw but little of the innermost circles of the Court. They passed a pleasant day with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in which dignity they found their old friend Colonel Robert Phelps, contented and unchanged. But their happiest time was spent in the gardens at Fulham, watching the boats upon the river Thames, and pacing the deep turf with the kindly Bishop, Dr. Henchman, whose heart was still in his old home at Salisbury, though the King had called him to London to rule over the first of English Sees.

Once too, urged by Hugh and by their own affections, the same party undertook a memorable voyage, the recollection of which still lends them something of the dignity of distant travel in the estimation of their friends, and crossed the seas and stayed with Johnny a whole summer in his stately Western home. How welcome they were made among the loyalists! How hospitably they were entertained! How they wondered at the wealth of the great colony, at its noble houses, at its rich and fruitful soil, at the rare beauty of its deep and spacious waters, of its encompassing, impenetrable woods, at the high spirit, the gallant

breeding, the fine manners, of the kindly, simple company they kept.

“ You dare to pretend you are lonely, Johnny,” Julia reproached him. “ Do you think that we shall ever believe in that again ? ”

And Johnny, whom they found unaltered, save for a fuller person and for a certain dignity the years had brought, —less like the King, Julia assured him, and with all the advantage of the difference on his side—admitted that his home had grown much dearer to him even than the memories of Salisbury and Trent, and that, as Julia had long since guessed, it was just possible that a companion still dearer might be willing to share his loneliness with him.

Johnny’s wife repaid that visit later, and rejoiced at the reputation which her husband bore in the old Cathedral city, and in the circumjacent parts of Somerset, Dorsetshire and Wilts. In the seventeenth century one such voyage lasted for a lifetime, and after their return, they travelled across the seas no more. But to-day in the fairest district of the Old Dominion, Johnny’s descendants still preserve his name, the relics with which the strange adventures of his youth endowed him, and the qualities of courage, loyalty, resource, perception, which enabled him so signally to serve the King, and which have enabled generations since to offer service as strong and single-hearted to a land whence Kings have passed away.

